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Sudan warned

PRESIDENT Hosni Mubarak yesterday received a report from Foreign Minister Amr Moussa on the African foreign ministers' meeting in Addis Ababa, which concerned itself mainly with Sudan's involvement in the attempted assassination against Mubarak last June.

Moussa told reporters that African countries were "disturbed" by terrorism and the accusations against Sudan, especially since Sudan "has not cleared its name or proven its innocence." Moussa had just returned from the ministerial meeting of the Organisation of African Unity's Conflict Resolution Apparatus (CRA) in Addis Ababa.

Moussa urged Sudan to "immediately carry out the CRA decisions" to avoid more serious repercussions.

NATO mission

NATO forces formally began their year-long mission to cement peace in Bosnia yesterday, taking over from the United Nations at a ceremony at Sarajevo's shrapnel-scarred airport. The transfer marked the official end to the UN's ill-fated three-and-a-half-year peacekeeping mission and the start of the alliance's toughest challenge to date. Some 60,000 troops will take part in overseeing a deal dividing Bosnia into a Muslim-Croat Federation and a separate Serb entity.

Officials from more than 40 countries met in Brussels yesterday to make preliminary plans for the reconstruction of Bosnia and to come up with the money needed to get work started.

First defeat

IN HIS first public statement on the communists' gains in the parliamentary elections, Russian President Boris Yeltsin said he would not be forced into changing his policies. Talking to reporters in an awards ceremony at the Barvikha Sanitarium outside Moscow, where he was recovering from a mild heart attack, Yeltsin refused to view the elections as a tragedy.

But, Communist Party leader Gennady Zyuganov said the polls signaled the final defeat of the anti-communist movement in post-Soviet Russia, and added he would continue his bid for the presidency in the elections due 16 June.

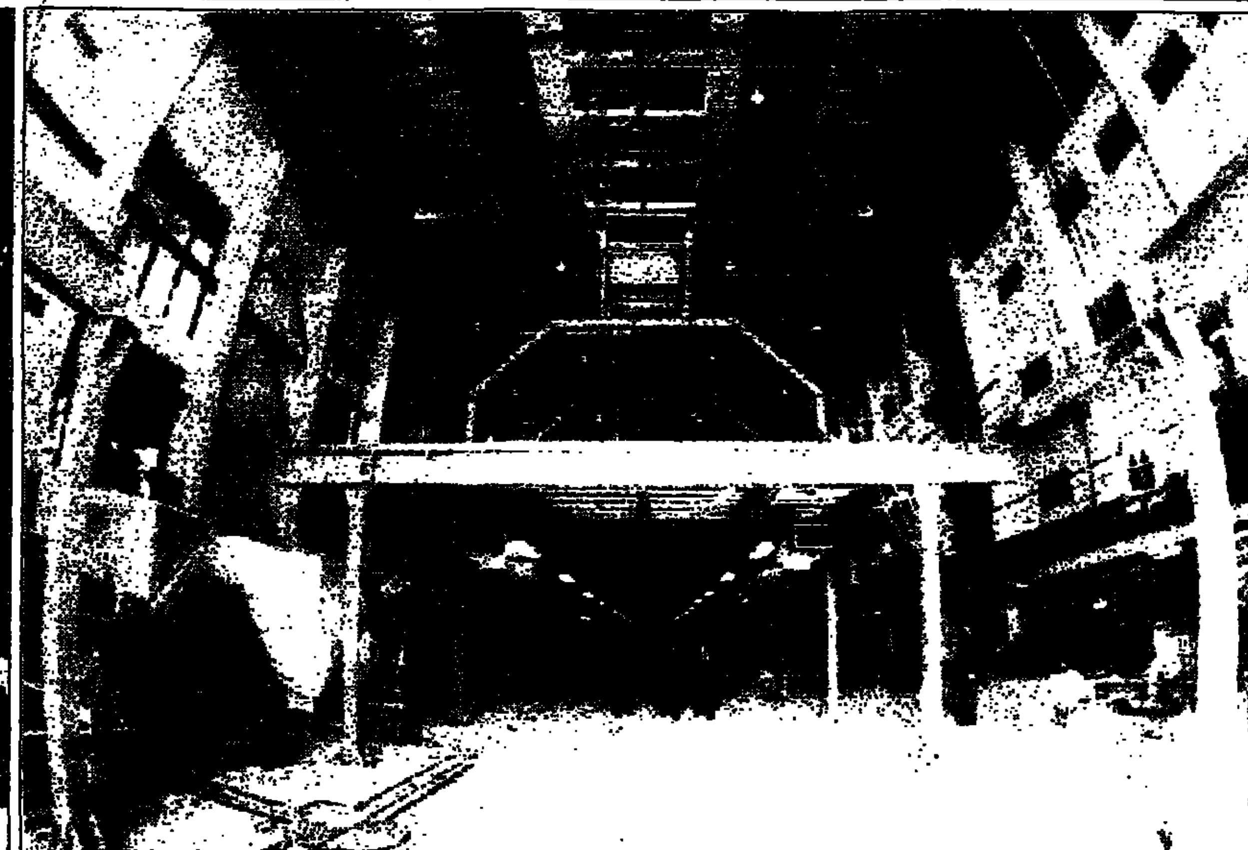
The latest party list results in the race for 225 of the total 450 seats in the Duma had the communists leading with just over 21 per cent of the votes. The party has won 53 places in single-seat constituencies from which the Duma's remaining 225 seats will be filled. *(see p.7)*

Militants shot

POLICE shot dead yesterday two suspected Islamist militants who were about to carry out attacks against policemen in the southern governorate of Minya, the Interior Ministry said. Police said the two militants were wanted for participating in at least seven attacks in which eight policemen and civilians were killed recently.

The two, named as Saad Abdallah and Ahmed Mohamed Ahmed, were hiding in fields near the village of Matai. Police said Abdallah and Ahmed started shooting in an attempt to escape but were killed when police fired back.

INSIDE



Nafie (L) with Printing General Manager Mustafa El-Khatib and a group of the organisation's editors and reporters on a magical tour — photos: Mohamed El-Qi'i

Printing for the 21st century

THIS week, and as Al-Ahram prepared to celebrate its 120th anniversary on 27 December, signs in the foyers of the twin Al-Ahram buildings extended an open invitation to the organisation's journalists to join editor-in-chief and board chairman Ibrahim Nafie on an inspection tour of the largest printing shop in the Middle East. By March '96 Al-Ahram's new state-of-the-art printing shop will start churning out newsprint. **Samir Sobhi** went on the tour.

Located in 6 October City, 50km away from Al-Ahram's downtown buildings, the new, fully computerised printing shop will produce 80,000 copies an hour — double the rate at Al-Ahram's current printing shop.

The new shop will be equipped with two printing lines, one with two outlets and the other with one. Printing will be possible in four colours within the same issue and the ink will be dried on the paper using a special infra-red device. A massive inserter machine will make it immeasurably easier to insert supplements into the main newspaper.

The 25,000 square-metre printing shop will also include its own electricity-generating station and a fully air-conditioned warehouse to store enough paper for a month's usage. A fleet of Al-Ahram vans will be stationed outside the printing shop for prompt distribution all over Egypt.

The Al-Ahram organisation has provided LE75 million out of the total cost of LE110 million for the new printing house. The European Investment Bank has, in addition, granted a loan of $40 million.

The new printing shop will also house Egypt's first museum of printing tools, collected by Al-Ahram over 120 years of publication.

Israel softens on early warning

Israel may be ready to drop its demand for an early warning system in the Golan Heights, thus removing a major obstacle on the Syrian-Israeli peace track

Israel might be willing to set aside its demand for Israeli ground-based early warning stations in the Golan Heights if Syria agrees to pull its troops back a long distance from the border, deputy Defence Minister Ori Orr said yesterday. Israel's demand for early warning stations prompted Syria to suspend negotiations last June.

But Orr told The Associated Press that a "cocktail of factors" could determine Israel's security requirements in the Golan Heights, which Israel captured from Syria in the 1967 War. These include the size of the Syrian army, and the distance of Syrian troops from the Israel-Syria border. "If you have a deep demilitarised zone, then there can be a different way of looking at things," he said.

There is currently a fighting force of five to six divisions of Syrian troops, more than 60,000 men, deployed between the Syrian capital of Damascus and the Golan Heights.

In place of Israeli monitoring stations, Orr suggested that satellites and positions manned by peacekeepers could be used instead. He added that Israel might allow ground stations to be manned by "other people... not necessarily Israelis".

Orr, a retired army major general who commanded the Syrian front as well as troops in Lebanon, said the need for ground stations should be looked at in the context of the whole negotiations. If Syrian forces were 200 kilometres from Israel, then Israel would be ready to discuss dropping its demand for monitoring stations.

On the other hand, if Syria insisted on keeping its forces only 20 kilometres from the border, then Israel would have to keep a ground station to report on Syrian military movements and provide advance warning of any attack. "It is a cocktail of factors," he said, "and we should consider them all".

He also indicated that Israel was now emphasising the need for progress on a broad range of issues; a shift in focus from the government of the late Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin, who had insisted that security issues be resolved first.

"We should talk about total peace," Orr said. "The quality of peace is very important. These advance warning requirements are also important. Let's first try to find out what kind of peace we are talking about."

Meanwhile, Israel Radio reported that Prime Minister Shimon Peres informed a meeting of his inner cabinet yesterday that Israel and Syria had agreed to step up the pace of the peace talks, which are resuming next week near Washington.

According to the broadcast, Peres told the ministers that a planned week-long break between two rounds of talks due to start on 27 December would be shortened by several days to maintain the momentum of the talks. The start of the second round was moved forward from 7 to 3 January.

Peres, who is trying to seal a peace pact with Syria before Israeli elections in October, revealed on Monday that Syria had agreed to a nine-point Israeli plan for the forthcoming negotiations. Close aides to Peres said that he had offered Syria an accelerated timetable for a Golan pullout.

Rabin had proposed a phased withdrawal over nearly four years, but Uri Savir, who will lead the Israeli delegation in the new round of talks, said withdrawal was possible in under three years.

Syrian Foreign Minister Farouk Al-Sha'ra said on Tuesday that Israel had spoken of a pull-out "over months, not years", but these remarks were swiftly denied by Peres.

In the build-up to the talks, Foreign Minister Ehud Barak said on Monday that an announcement by the prime minister that Israel recognises Syrian sovereignty over the Golan could soon be forthcoming.

In Washington, US Secretary of State Warren Christopher, talking in a TV interview, said he expected Syria and Israel to agree on a framework for future peace negotiations when they resume negotiations next week.

"I'm expecting to go back [to the Middle East] with some progress. I'm hoping to go back with a framework that enables the US to move ahead both procedurally and substantively," Christopher said.

Christopher, who returned from a Middle East tour on Monday, has said he plans to return there in January after the two rounds of talks are over.

PNA and Hamas agree to disagree

AFTER three days of round the clock talks in Cairo, Hamas delegates and officials of the Palestinian National Authority (PNA) still seem far apart on the issues of Hamas participation in the self-rule elections and ending attacks on Israel. PLO leader Yasser Arafat is due to join the negotiations today, reports **Sherine Bahaa**.

Although the PNA presented a list of options to Hamas yesterday in an attempt to persuade the Islamist group to participate, Mahmoud Zahar, Hamas spokesman in the Gaza Strip, told *Al-Ahram Weekly* that Hamas will not be taking part in the elections on 20 January.

"The elections would only legitimise the self-rule authority and not Palestinians sovereignty over their territories. The elections will include only a section of the Palestinian people, namely, residents of the self-rule areas," said Zahar.

Mohamed Nazzal, official spokesman of the Hamas delegation, told the *Weekly* that the options included limited participation by Hamas in East Jerusalem and Hebron elections. What matters to the PNA, added Nazzal, is that the Hamas leadership does not dissuade its supporters from voting.

PNA delegation member and political advisor to PLO leader Nabil Amr explained that a huge turnout was necessary in Jerusalem to "reinforce the Palestinian presence in negotiations in the city's final status", reported AFP.

Hamas refuses to participate in legislative elections set up as a result of the Oslo agreements between the PLO and Israel. Hamas does not want to be part of a self-rule council which will be charged with conducting final status negotiations with Israel on the fate of Jerusalem, refugees' right to return, and the future of Israeli settlements.

Another point of controversy is Hamas' insistence on its right to carry out military operations against Israel. Nazzal explained that Hamas' position will not change as long as the occupation remains in force. To Hamas, "Palestinians' right to self-determination does not appear to be on the horizon," said Nazzal. He stressed that the movement's military activities are directed at the occupation forces wherever they are and not the PNA.

Despite their points of disagreement, both sides agreed on the need for national unity. "At least both of us want to solve our problems in a peaceful way. I believe this is an important, positive step to avoid becoming a new Afghanistan or Somalia," Nazzal said.

Christmas ecstasy in Bethlehem

Three days before Christmas, Israeli troops are set to withdraw from the birthplace of Jesus Christ

Plastic Father Christmases and tinsel garlands vie with Palestinian flags and portraits of PLO leader Yasser Arafat as the birthplace of Jesus Christ prepares to celebrate its first Christmas under Palestinian rule.

Arafat's portraits almost outnumber the Christmas decorations, triggering mutterings of discontent among some of Bethlehem's Christian residents as they prepare to celebrate the changeover with their fellow Muslim Palestinians, the French news agency reported.

Israeli troops are due to pull out tonight, ending 28 years of occupation. Palestinians had demanded that Bethlehem gain self-rule before Christmas as part of an agreement under which Israel relinquished most of the West Bank and Gaza Strip.

The handover had been scheduled for Monday, but it was held up for four days as Israel hurried to complete a by-pass road that will allow Jewish settlers living south of the town to travel to Jerusalem without passing through Palestinian-ruled land.

Bethlehem's small Manger Square, nestled alongside the Church of the Nativity where Christmas Eve mass will be celebrated on Sunday, is already awash with decorations.

Arafat plans a much publicised Christmas Eve visit to attend midnight mass, as one of the highlights of the arrival of autonomy in six major West Bank towns.

Thousands of pennants bearing his portrait hang from wires strung across Manger Square, while another giant picture covers the entire side of a building in the town of 30,000.

"It's our first Palestinian Christmas, we're going to eat and drink even more than in past years", said Ghassan Dawoud, 31, an electrician helping to string up lights and Christmas decorations. "I've been working like a madman to get the town ready."

Dawoud and his colleagues were rushing to finish the preparations on Tuesday, attaching giant illuminated stars to the street lamps, hanging golden bells and red and white ribbons from the cypress trees and spray-painting decorations on building walls alongside anti-Israeli slogans.

Noah Salamah, a 43-year-old Muslim, said he would celebrate Christmas "not for Arafat, but so my kids can see Father Christmas and all the lights and so we can congratulate our Christian brothers".

Sister Françoise Therese, member of a Carmelite mission founded in 1846, is feeling a little pre-Christmas tension. "I'm not sure how it's going to go this year. The stage where choirs usually sing hasn't even been set up yet," she said, pointing to the square outside the church. "The church is small and the square, too, and all the Palestinians are going to flock here. But still, I'm happy that the Israelis are leaving." *(see p.5)*

Yemen vows to regain island

Yemen warned Eritrea to withdraw from a Red Sea island or face military action to force it out

President Ali Abdullah Saleh warned yesterday that Yemen would go to war to recover a Red Sea island captured by Eritrea if the dispute was not resolved peacefully.

And the Yemeni government newspaper *Al-Thawra* urged Eritrea to "erase the traces of its aggression" against the island of Greater Hanish, which Eritrean forces captured on Monday after a three-day battle.

Greater Hanish, the major island in a chain between the two nations, sits in the middle of one of the world's major shipping lanes 160 kilometres north of Bab Al-Mandab, the southern entrance to the Red Sea. The dispute between Yemen, which lies on the southwest corner of the Arabian Peninsula, and Eritrea, across Bab Al-Mandab in the Horn of Africa, has been simmering for months.

The Associated Press quoted Saleh as telling a political rally: "The island must be liberated, either peacefully or by war."

Saleh said he had refused an offer by Eritrean President Issiais Aferworki to meet to discuss the issue. Such a meeting, he said, could take place only after Eritrea returns all prisoners and removes its military presence from Greater Hanish.

Saleh, who has the support of the 22-member Arab League and the six-nation Gulf Cooperation Council, repeated earlier Yemeni claims that Eritrea had invaded the island on Friday, describing the action as a "childish adventure against a friendly and neighbouring country." He said Yemen had lost a helicopter and three men in the fighting. Eritrea said it lost six men.

Al-Thawra said Sanaa would settle the territorial dispute if Eritrea "apologised for its actions". It warned the Eritreans against complacency because Yemen has "the means to retaliate against any attack and recover its rights by force". Nevertheless, *Al-Thawra* added, the Yemeni leadership was "determined to show wisdom and reason and to resolve the issue peacefully".

The Eritrean Foreign Ministry described Yemeni attacks on its troops in Greater Hanish as a "miscalculation" and said it was prepared to accept a full investigation of the situation by an impartial and independent body.

It said Yemen made its first mistake when it stationed troops on the island last month, "so as to create a de facto situation of occupation", and made more mistakes when it refused to withdraw and launched military attacks. But Yemen said the situation became tense after Eritrea ordered all Yemenis off the island on 11 November and attacked last Friday.

According to the French news agency, Yemen garrisoned 500 troops on the island in early November, but their fate remained unknown. Eritrea said it had captured 180 prisoners but would release them as a goodwill gesture.

In addition to Greater Hanish, ownership of the nearby islands of Lesser Hanish and Zuqar is also disputed by the two nations.

In Cairo, Foreign Minister Amr Moussa said Egypt opposed any escalation of hostilities in the Red Sea region and wanted to see the dispute settled "immediately and by political means. The Egyptian position is that Yemen and Eritrea should reach a political and quick solution." Moussa affirmed Egypt's readiness to act as a mediator. *(see p.5)*

Al-Ahram Weekly

Journalists draft new press law

The General Assembly of the Press Syndicate will meet in an extraordinary session on Sunday to take stock of progress so far on the preparation of a new press law, writes **Mona El-Nahhas**

The Press Syndicate's Council, at a meeting on Sunday, decided to convene an extraordinary session of the syndicate's General Assembly on 24 December to review progress made in the preparation of a new press law to replace the controversial Law 93 for 1995. Enacted at the end of May, Law 93 continues to be the target of journalists' wrath because of the harsh penalties it imposes for publication offences.

To defuse the crisis triggered by this legislation, the Supreme Press Council, acting on the government's behalf, set up a committee of legal experts and journalists in June to draft an alternative law, scheduled for completion within three months. As the committee dragged its feet and the self-imposed deadline expired, the Press Syndicate set up its own committee of 15 journalists and legal experts to prepare an alternative draft law for submission to the government-appointed committee, so it could take the syndicate's view into account. The syndicate committee completed its work on 12 December and its 64-article draft was forwarded to the official committee.

Speaking after Sunday's meeting of the syndicate's council, Chairman Ibrahim Nafie said the governmental committee had "laid down the general principles of the legislation, and sub-committees are working on drawing up the new law". The new draft would be completed in two weeks, he assured, and would "meet all the demands made by journalists in previous general assemblies and by the Third General Congress of Journalists".

The General Assembly of 24 December — next Sunday — will be briefed on the outcome of the work of both committees, Nafie said.

The last General Assembly, held in October, had set 24 December as a fresh deadline for the governmental committee to complete its work. At that time it was decided that unless this deadline was met, syndicate members serving on the governmental committee should walk out. But syndicate sources said Sunday's General Assembly was likely to allow the committee more time, probably another month.

Journalist Kamel Zoheiri, a member of the governmental committee, said that committee members had decided to hold two weekly meetings, instead of one, to expedite their work. Zoheiri, a staunch opponent of Law 93, expects fierce infighting "because it will not be easy for us to convince other, pro-government, committee members of our point of view. So we need to be very patient, and at the same time cautious, as we defend our cause."

Details of the law under preparation by the government committee were not disclosed. Syndicate sources said that the syndicate committee's draft deals with publication offences, press freedom and the duties and rights of journalists. The draft, which takes into account the recommendations of last September's Third General Congress of Journalists, the October General Assembly and a document prepared by the Human Rights Legal Aid Centre, excludes imprisonment, provided for in Law 93, as a punishment for publication offences, and reduces the fine from LE25,000 to LE2,000.

It also lifts all restrictions on the publication of newspapers. Instead of applying for a newspaper licence, a would-be publisher would only have to send written notification to the Supreme Press Council. "I think it's a very good draft which meets the demands of all journalists," said Magdi Mehanna, a member of the syndicate's council. "But I think that certain provisions will not pass easily, such as the clause lifting restrictions on the publication of newspapers."

The draft also states that newspapers should not be confiscated nor be subject to any type of censorship. And reporters should not be sacked unless the syndicate is informed in advance of the reasons for their dismissal. The reporter's case would then be submitted to a special committee, headed by a representative of the Supreme Press Council, and including syndicate and employer representatives. This committee would make a decision on the case within two weeks. The purpose of this clause, explained Rag'ai El-Merghani of the syndicate's legal committee, is to avoid arbitrary dismissals.

The draft suggests that publication offences should be referred by the public prosecutor to a special body, made up of three judges from the Court of Cassation, for investigation. "This would guarantee that the investigation is impartial," El-Merghani said.

The draft also seeks to protect journalists against government pressure: journalists should not be taken into custody in the course of their work; they should not be banned from publishing their articles and they should not be dismissed because of articles they have published. The Press Syndicate would be the only body responsible for punishing journalists who violate the syndicate's code of ethics.

The draft also specifies the obligations of journalists: they should not intrude on the private lives of ordinary people, but they may deal with the private lives and behaviour of public figures, provided that any investigation aims to serve the public interest. Reporters should not be allowed to work in advertising.





PREPARING FOR THE 21ST CENTURY: On a quick visit to South Sinai Tuesday morning, President Mubarak toured the area, which has LE75 billion earmarked for its development. On site, Mubarak became acquainted with a number of tourist projects under construction (left), spoke with employees of Egypt's tourism industry (centre) and met with tourists in Sharm Al-Sheikh. Mubarak said that developing the land, resources and housing in the peninsula will open up new horizons for the future. *(see interview with South Sinai Governor, p.4)*

Unaccountably independent

The political affiliation of many independents who sought to join the ruling party's ranks after they were elected to Parliament remains ambiguous. **Gamal Essam El-Din** investigates

The exact size of the majority held by the ruling National Democratic Party (NDP) in the new People's Assembly remains unclear because no decision has apparently been taken on applications filed by a large number of winning independents to join or re-join the party's ranks.

The NDP fielded 439 candidates in the election battle. One hundred and twenty eight of these won seats in the 29 November first round and 190 emerged victorious in the 6 December second round, giving the NDP a total of 318 seats or 71 per cent of the Assembly's 444 contested seats. But headlines in the Arabic-language press on 7 December announced that the NDP actually held 417 seats, or 93 per cent, because 99 out of the 114 successful independents had entered the party's fold. Many of them were either NDP members or former members who ran as independents because their names were not on the party's official list of candidates.

The move aroused controversy in political circles, with analysts questioning the ethics of a candidate who changes his political affiliation after winning an election. The Arabic-language press, as well as highly-placed officials, suggested that their acceptance by the NDP was a foregone conclusion, until Information Minister Safwat El-Sherif, who serves as the NDP's assistant secretary-general, told reporters last week that only independents who rejoined the NDP before the second round runoffs would be accepted. He put their number at "around 20". *Al-Ahram* wrote that the policy was a "reflection of the NDP's wish to maintain the non-party character of independents and encourage a strong opposition in parliament".

Kamal El-Shazli, minister of state for parliamentary affairs and another NDP assistant secretary-general, told *Al-Ahram Weekly* that "there is a strong move to accept only a limited number of independents" into the party. But he said the final decision rests with the NDP chairman, President Hosni Mubarak.

As a result, some NDP sympathisers said they would now prefer to maintain their independent status not only because they had embraced new beliefs but also because they felt let down by the party, which seemed to want to exclude them. One of them is businessman Abdel-Salam Hegazi who won a seat in the Beheira constituency of Itay Al-Baroud in the western Nile Delta. Although he had represented the NDP in the parliaments of 1976 and 1979, his name was struck off the NDP's candidate list in the recent elections. "I think it would be better to remain as an independent, which means I have greater freedom to express my views in the assembly without coming under pressure," he said.

Mohamed Fathi El-Baradi represents another group of independents who made it clear to voters that they were NDP sympathisers and would rejoin the NDP if they won. El-Baradi applied for readmittance to the NDP before the second round runoffs and his subsequent victory in the Gharbiya constituency of Kafr Al-Zayyat in the Nile Delta.

El-Baradi said that he had been an official NDP candidate in the 1990 elections, and lost. He denied allegations of voter deception this time round: "Although I ran as an independent, I told the voters that I planned to re-join the NDP. They believed me because they are aware of my strong connections with the party."

A third category are the "genuine independents" who have no wish to join the NDP or any other party. They include Ahmed Taha (Al-Sahel, Cairo), Abdel-Moneim El-Oleimi (Tanta, Gharbiya) and El-Rifai Hamada (Port Said).

El-Oleimi told the *Weekly* that joining the NDP would mean that he had deceived the electorate "who voted for me as an independent". He began his parliamentary career as an independent, he said, and wanted to keep it that way. "Independence means that you are free of all kinds of pressures and that you are not tied up by any pre-conceived policies or programmes."

Veteran independent Ahmed Taha expressed the hope that the majority of independents would maintain their non-party status and not join the NDP. "This large number could form an effective opposition force in the new assembly," he said. "Although some genuine independents who put up strong opposition in the outgoing assembly have lost their seats, I hope that new independents, as genuine as the old ones even if they are NDP sympathisers, will blunt the effects of the NDP's sweeping majority in the house."

Lawyer contests parliament .. yet again

Kamal Khaled, a lawyer who played a key role in having two previous parliaments disbanded, is reviving previously failed legal action to bring down the new People's Assembly. He spoke to **Dina Ezzat**

Lawyer Kamal Khaled is planning to revive a legal battle which he first launched in 1990, to get a ruling from the Supreme Constitutional Court that the parliamentary election law violates the constitution. If he wins, the current People's Assembly will be disbanded.

"The recently-inaugurated parliament was elected on the basis of a law that is unconstitutional," Khaled told *Al-Ahram Weekly*. "It is a law that I have been battling against for the past five years."

He outlined what he views as a basic discrepancy between the election law and the constitution: According to Khaled, article 88 of the constitution stipulates that the entire voting process across the nation, in every principal and auxilliary polling station, should be under the full supervision of the judiciary. Meanwhile, Article 24 of the election law authorises the interior minister, who belongs to the executive, not the judicial, authority, to assign supervisors to the auxilliary polling stations, leaving only the principal stations under judicial supervision. "This is an obvious violation of the constitution," Khaled claimed.

In October 1990, when he was contesting the parliamentary elections of that year, Khaled filed a lawsuit with an administrative court, challenging the constitutionality of the election law and requesting permission to take the case to the Supreme Constitutional Court. His objective was to have Article 24 of the election law modified so the entire voting process would be placed under the supervision of the judiciary.

In less than a month, Khaled won the necessary permission. The Supreme Constitutional Court requested its Supreme Commissioners' Authority — an advisory council to the court — to study the case and formulate a legal opinion.

But it was only in October 1994 that the Supreme Commissioners Authority recommended that the case be dismissed on the grounds that Khaled had won a seat in the 1990 elections and that parliament was approaching the end of its term.

Unperturbed, Khaled insisted that the Commissioners Authority pronounce a legal opinion on whether there is a contradiction between the constitution and the election law. "But I did not get this legal opinion and the matter has not moved forward since then," he said.

Alarmed by what he called the "gravity of the violations committed by the executive authority in the recent elections", Khaled decided to reinstitute the case. "This week, I will serve the Commissioners' Authority with a legal warning, demanding that it express its much-awaited legal opinion in the space of one month," he said. If the authority does not respond, Khaled will initiate legal procedures to have the authority's members replaced. "It is like when a defendant requests the change of a judge whose impartiality is deemed questionable," he explained.

According to Khaled, the authors of the constitution specifically stipulated that the auxilliary polling stations be under the judiciary's supervision "because they knew that it is in those stations that most of the vote-rigging takes place".

Defenders of the election law, on the other hand, argue that since the auxilliary stations are affiliated to the principal station, then, in the final analysis, all polling stations are supervised by the judiciary. But Khaled rejects this argument, "which is based on an assumption of good will. The way things went during the two rounds of the last elections proves that the judge in charge of a constituency's principal polling station has no way of stopping rigging taking place in the auxiliary stations. He cannot monitor every station personally."

Both the 1984 and 1987 assemblies were brought down after Khaled won rulings from the Supreme Constitutional Court that the election law, on whose basis the assemblies had been elected, was unconstitutional. In the 1984 elections, the slate system was used, obliging the candidates of each party to run on a collective slate in each constituency. In the 1987 elections, the slate system was used again, but a seat was also reserved for independents in each constituency. The Constitutional Court condemned both systems as discriminatory against independents and, consequently, unconstitutional.

Khaled, who did not run in this year's election, is also providing legal assistance to about 100 defeated candidates who are demanding that the election results in their constituencies be annulled for alleged fraud. Their motion has been challenged by the government. The Supreme Administrative Court will hear the case next Sunday.

Yet, Khaled's ambitious plan may stumble over a basic constitutional block. "According to the constitution, only the president of the republic has the authority to dissolve parliament," said Fawziya Abdel-Sattar, professor of law at Cairo University. She said the president can dissolve parliament if it reached a dead end with the government over a major policy dispute, and a national referendum ordered by the president of the republic proves that parliament has lost the people's confidence. Abdel-Sattar, head of the legislative committee in the 1990-95 assembly, does not think that the dissolution of the 1984 and 1987 chambers was due to the Supreme Constitutional Court rulings. She contends that the president acted the way he did because he deemed it "convenient" to disband parliament in the circumstances.

It is now an open question whether Khaled will win a court ruling that might lead to presidential action.

Election watchdogs set to keep on watching

An election-watch committee will find another role for itself after it publishes a comprehensive report on the parliamentary elections soon. **Omayma Abdel-Latif** reports

Senior members of an election-watch committee agreed at a meeting on Monday that the committee should remain active even after it accomplishes its principal objective — the publication of a comprehensive report on the parliamentary elections of 29 November and 6 December. But there were disagreements as to what the committee's future role should be.

Present at the meeting were the committee's chairman, Said El-Naggar, an economist, deputy chairman Milad Hanna, a housing expert, Mohamed Selim El-Awwa, a lawyer and Islamic scholar, Said El-Gamal, a jurist, Nabil El-Hilali, a leftist lawyer, and Hassan Nafa'a, a professor of political science. Representatives of human rights groups and non-governmental organisations that contributed to the committee's work also attended.

The committee has already published two preliminary reports on the two rounds of elections, which reported many irregularities, including vote-rigging and the arrest of candidates' supporters. It is planning to release a comprehensive and final report in about two weeks.

Chairman Said El-Naggar's suggestion that the committee should not disband after the report was released was supported by the attending members. "Our work should not stop with the publication of this report," El-Naggar argued. "The committee should continue as a mechanism to emphasise the importance of participation in public life."

However, while some members suggested that the committee should involve itself in monitoring human rights violations, others insisted that it should confine itself to election-related issues.

"Our prime concern should be the performance of voters and candidates," maintained Said El-Gamal. "In this way, we can promote society's understanding of the electoral process. It will also help us draw an overall picture of the political situation in this country." This could be achieved, he said, by observing municipal, trade union and syndicate elections. No final decision was taken on the issue.

The forthcoming report, committee members said, would focus in its first part on refuting government charges that the committee had violated the law and the constitution by appointing itself as an election-monitor.

"The committee has won de facto legality from voters as well as the political forces that participated in the elections," claimed Milad Hanna.

And Selim El-Awwa argued that the committee's work was in line with the constitution, which describes active citizenship as a national duty. "Everyone has the right to choose his own way of contributing to civil society," El-Awwa said. Moreover, he added, the action of hundreds of candidates who authorised the committee to act as their poll-watchers in the elections vested its work with additional legitimacy.

The report will also deal with the participation of Copts and women in the elections, and will criticise the fact that not a single Copt was included in the ruling party's list of candidates. It will also seek to establish a precise figure for voter turnout, officially set at around 49 per cent of the nation's 20 million registered voters. Another task will be to follow up the ongoing legal battles between the government and numerous defeated candidates who are seeking to have the election results annulled in their constituencies.

Weekly makes debut

A new weekly newspaper, claiming to be totally independent, hit the newsstands last week. **Khaled Dawoud** takes a look

In a large flat in downtown Qasr Al-Nil Street, a team of young reporters, mostly aged between 25 and 35, have produced the first edition of what they describe as a "liberal" and truly independent newspaper. The weekly *Al-Destour*, which is published on Wednesdays, made its first appearance last week, claiming to be the first Egyptian publication that is neither controlled by the government, the opposition, nor Gulf oil money. In a front page editorial, the reporters described their stance as anti-Israeli and anti-Islamist extremist, and opposed to what they called the hegemony which Saudi Arabia seeks to impose on the Arab media by means of its petro-dollars.

The reporters are led by Ibrahim Eissa, 30, a former writer at the weekly magazine *Rose El-Youssef*, who wanted, he said, to prove that a reporter does not have to reach the age of 50 before getting the chance to become editor-in-chief.

Because of the newspaper's claim to true independence, financing was the first question that came to the minds of many readers as they opened their copies on Wednesday.

Eissa maintains that *Al-Destour* is a private enterprise, whose owners are seeking to prove that it is possible to actually make money by publishing a newspaper. While describing the newspaper as a joint venture in which anybody could have a share, Eissa said that its initial capital came from two main sources: Ahmed El-Khawaga, chairman of the Bar Association, and Essam Fahmi, a book publisher.

In a telephone interview from Paris, El-Khawaga told the *Weekly* that *Al-Destour*'s required capital was LE1 million, but that only half of this amount had been raised so far. He said there were four main partners, each of whom had contributed LE100,000, with the newspaper's staff contributing the remainder.

"I agreed to participate in this project because I wanted to encourage young journalists to produce an independent newspaper," El-Khawaga said. "There are almost no independent newspapers in Egypt. Although national [state-run] newspapers are heading in this direction, they still have government affiliations."

In order to dodge domestic restrictions on newspaper production, *Al Destour*'s publishers had to register themselves as an off-shore company in Cyprus. It took them five months, according to Eissa, to get the approval of the many domestic authorities, including state security, to print and distribute in Egypt.

The first issue carried several hot headlines — like "LE200 million to secure Egyptian embassies abroad" — which were obviously aimed at catching the reader's eye, a tactic practised by Eissa's old employer, *Rose El-Youssef*. In its 16 pages, the newspaper included what Eissa described as "stories that would interest the average reader". Several were written with a touch of irony; others were not devoid of editorialising.

The newspaper has the well-known slogan of the Wafd Party on its masthead: "the nation is the source of all power". This, together with the fact that El-Khawaga and Fahmi are both Wafdists, has led to speculation as to whether the newspaper is truly independent or in fact another mouthpiece of the Wafd Party.

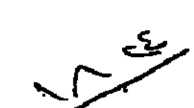
Eissa insisted that the newspaper had no connections with the Wafd. This was confirmed by Fahmi, who said that while he was proud to be a Wafdist, the newspaper did not take orders from the party.

"The newspaper will champion a free economy and private enterprise, which is in line with the principles of the Wafd party," he said. "But our stand on Saudi Arabia and its influence in the Arab world differs from that of the Wafdists. We do not take orders from them."

He recalled that the Wafd Party's newspaper was profitable when it first appeared in 1984, and was confident that *Al-Destour* would also make money. Eissa says that two pages of advertisements each week and sales of 80-90 per cent of the 50,000 copies printed are enough to ensure the paper's success. According to a letter from the *Al-Ahram* organisation, which is responsible for *Al-Destour*'s distribution, the 50,000 copies of the first issue were sold out. Eissa said he planned to print 70,000 copies of the second issue and, in the space of a few months, raise the number of pages to 20.

"We recognise that it is hard for people, who always suspect a conspiracy, to believe that we are truly independent," Eissa said. "We consider this to be a challenge."

Edited by **Wadie Kirolos**



هكذا من الأهرام

Protected bridge to the Theban necropolis

President Mubarak ordered a compromise solution to resolve a controversy surrounding the construction of a bridge across the River Nile at Luxor. Omayma Abdel-Latif reports


The bridge, made antiquities-friendly, is to be completed on schedule — Mubarak visiting Madinet Habu in the Theban necropolis

President Hosni Mubarak visited Luxor last Thursday to decide the fate of a Nile bridge whose construction triggered a controversy on the grounds that it could endanger the ancient and unique monuments on the river's west bank. Mubarak ordered that the bridge be completed but, to ward off possible negative consequences, the historical reserve area surrounding the site is to be extended and encroachments on the Theban necropolis strictly banned.

The bridge, whose construction was begun in 1991, will link the river's eastern bank and the city of Luxor with the burial grounds of the kings and queens of ancient Egypt on the west bank. With about 80 per cent of the construction work completed, the bridge is scheduled to open in mid-1996.

Mubarak told reporters that the bridge was indispensable from a touristic and economic standpoint, but he insisted that it should not be allowed to damage the environment. "The construction of the Luxor bridge does not necessarily conflict with preserving the historical and physical environment of this archaeological preserve", Mubarak said during his tour of the city, which included a visit to the construction site. According to the president's directives, the historical reserve will be expanded southwards to include the bridge, which is located eight kilometres south of the defined necropolis boundary.

Mubarak ordered the setting up of a ministerial committee under Prime Minister Atef Sidki to follow up on his directives to turn the entire location into a historical reserve. At its first meeting on Tuesday, Culture Minister Farouk Hosni submitted a report on the restrictions that should be imposed to ban the building of informal housing and unofficial kiosks on the site.

"One of the proposals in this report is to expand the west bank's historical reserve even further to a point that is four to five kilometres south of the bridge," Hosni told *Al-Ahram Weekly*. "Land ownership in this area should be brought under the supervision of the Ministry of Culture and, to discourage urban encroachments, the government will take charge of setting up tourist facilities designed not to endanger the monuments."

Mubarak had discussed the bridge's construction with Ministry of Culture and local administration officials back in September 1991, stressing that plans must take into account the safeguarding of the Theban necropolis. The project was the subject of additional studies by the ministries of culture, transport, local administration and tourism along with the Luxor city council. When Mubarak visited Luxor in December of that year, he stressed again that the bridge's design should not disfigure the general panorama of the archaeological site.

"The president's decision is meant to achieve a balance between the requirements of development and the need to preserve the historical sites," said Abdel-Halim Noureddin, head of the Supreme Council of Antiquities (SCA). "Development means that the construction of the bridge must be completed, provided that additional legislation is passed to ban any encroachment on the Theban necropolis."

Noureddin said that "we will ensure that the protected area extends as far as the Luxor bridge, which will be under the supervision of the SCA, thus making encroachments and haphazard housing impossible." He added that a committee from the SCA will inspect the site within the next few days to examine the question of extending the historical reserve.

Opponents of the bridge were up in arms during the past two weeks, arguing that allowing motorised vehicles onto the west bank would make it extremely difficult to stop makeshift buildings springing up in the area. As well as being unsightly, building development would cause water seepage and other erosion factors which would affect the monuments.

But Maj. Gen. Ahmed Fouad, head of the Luxor city council, denied that the bridge's construction would result in slum areas mushrooming near the Theban necropolis. "Presidential Decree No. 267 issued in 1981 has defined the boundaries of the Theban necropolis. It also stipulated that construction work is prohibited on the archaeological site and this is a sufficient deterrent," he said.

According to Fouad, the bridge will promote the influx of tourists from the Red Sea. With the rise in tourism, he said, "there is no way that a ferry, or any number of ferries, will be able to fulfil the transport requirements."

The head of the Roads and Bridges Authority, Fouad Abdel-Aziz, agreed that the bridge's construction posed no extra danger. "The ferries already transport vehicles, people, animals and goods," he said. "The bridge will function in the same way".

Zahi Hawwas, director of the Giza Plateau, suggested that a master plan for landscaping both Luxor city and the archaeological site was necessary at this stage. "We have to meet the locals' demand for a bridge, but we must also ensure that the archaeological site is preserved. Only a master plan, as well as a reserve, will maintain the balance between archaeology and development," he said.

Hawwas suggested that no construction work should be allowed as far as 10 kilometres from the boundaries of the historical reserve, and that no vehicles should be allowed to park in the Valley of the Kings.

Al-Ahram: A *Diwan* of contemporary life

With the advent of the 19th century and the emergence of the modern Egyptian state, the power of the Bedouin tribes began to ebb. In this instalment of his chronicle of modern Egyptian history as seen through the pages of *Al-Ahram*, Dr Yunan Labib Rizq looks at the disintegration of traditional tribal solidarity which paved the way for the assimilation of the desert Arabs into the rest of Egyptian society



In his celebrated encyclopaedic work, "The Personality of Egypt: A Study in the Genius of Place", the late Dr Gamal Hamdan cites numerous proofs of Egypt's capacity to absorb newcomers and to overcome alien disparities so as to conform with its social constitution. Perhaps the anomaly that posed the most significant challenge to the country's homogeneity in its modern history was the Bedouin tribes that were encroaching on the Nile Valley from the Western and Eastern Deserts.

For a considerable period of time, these tribes continued to shake the Egyptian social and political structure. They were a constant plague to the agricultural areas on the edge of the Delta, particularly in the Sharqiya and Beheira provinces, and along the fringes of the Nile Valley in Upper Egypt, notably in Beni Suef, Minya and Fayoum. Such havoc did they wreak that at one stage the Ottoman authorities commissioned the army's seventh military regiment, which was responsible for the national defence of Egypt, to protect the rural areas from Bedouin raids.

At the same time, the tribes constituted a major breach in central government control over the nation's territories. In fact, some tribal leaders were able to establish independent sheikhdoms. In the 18th century, for example, the sheikh of the Huwara, Himam El-Farshouti, took advantage of the disintegrating authority in Cairo, then embroiled in the conflict between the Ottomans and the Mamlukes, to establish a virtually autonomous entity in Upper Egypt.

In effect, there evolved an inverse relationship between the power of the tribes and the power of the state. Thus, with the advent of the 19th century and the emergence of the strong modern state, the power of the tribes began to ebb. Several factors contributed to this, not least of which was the government's readiness to resort to force if necessary. However, the tribal leaders were allowed to own land as well as to occupy important government positions. We find a prominent illustration of this trend in Suleiman Pasha Abaza of the Abaida tribes in Sharqiya province. The last post among the many he occupied was as chief of the provincial directorate, a post that had been formerly reserved for members of the Turkish aristocracy that were closer to the throne.

Power and politics alone, however, were not enough to expunge the distortion. Even after they were settled, the Bedouins continued to constitute a separate society with distinct traditions. The following narrative from *Al-Ahram*'s correspondent in Abu Kabeir illustrates the cleft in Egypt's social fabric:

"A woman from the Sama'ina tribe wanted to marry a man from the Masa'id tribe, but her brother refused to marry her to him. In order to free herself from the despotism of her brother who had refused many other suitors, the woman and her suitor sought the help of Sheikh Aliwa El-Tahawa. The sheikh, having ascertained that the woman had been divorced from her first husband, sanctioned the marriage. The Sama'ina tribe was infuriated. They sent complaints to every imaginable government agency, stating that the woman had not been released from her marriage to the first husband. The honourable commissioner of this area acted resolutely. He ordered the woman and her husband to appear before the religious court. In the presence of large crowds of men of both tribes, the judge ruled that the couple were divorced, thus bringing the affair to a happy conclusion."

If the woman's decision to marry outside her tribe had provoked such a furore one can imagine what would have happened had she tried to marry a man who was not a Bedouin at all.

The intensity of Bedouin aloofness can be seen in their persistence in pursuing their autonomous life-style, in spite of economic incentives and social developments. Also, until modern times, the lack of clearly demarcated and patrolled national borders enhanced the autonomy of these nomadic tribes. They could come and go as they pleased within the territories of the Ottoman empire. The following *Al-Ahram* account from Sharqiya exemplifies this.

"Mohamed Effendi Sultan, the legal representative of the Hanadi tribe currently residing in Al-Assadiya, submitted a grievance against certain legal measures the government intends to impose upon the tribe. The lawyer went so far as to threaten that the tribe would sell all its land and property and move to Syria where they 'could live in peace and security under the guardianship of His Royal Highness the Sultan and commander of the faithful.'"

Nevertheless, a cursory reading of *Al-Ahram* of the last decade of the 19th century provides evidence of the effect of historic developments on tribal unity. The government's policy of granting land to tribal elders created a rift between them and other members of the tribe who became for the most part agricultural workers. Also, the appointment of tribal leaders to government positions weakened the position of the sheikh within the tribe. Suddenly they became the instruments to implement government policy. This provoked many tribal members to reject the authority of the sheikh and turn to the nearby agrarian areas as a source for livelihood and plunder.

Hardly a month would pass during that decade without one reading in *Al-Ahram* of at least one incident of Bedouin lawbreaking. Most of these cases involved individuals operating outside the the tribal framework — an indication of the disintegration of tribal bonds. The fact that the government could force the sheikhs to surrender the culprits to the authorities is indicative of both the growing strength of the state and the diminishing influence of the tribal leaders. Further testimony to the increasing sway of the state is the fact that, more and more, when tribal feuding would erupt, it would be resolved through the intervention of national security forces, not by the mediation of the sheikhs. Finally, there was the surprising development that disputes between Bedouins and farmers would generally be resolved in favour of the latter. This, more than other phenomena of the period, attests to the disintegration of traditional tribal solidarity owing to the circumstances that paved the way for the assimilation of the desert Arabs into the rest of Egyptian society — in the countryside, on the outskirts of the cities and among the fishermen along the coasts.

A dispatch from *Al-Ahram*'s correspondent in Fayoum on 16 April 1891 is indicative of this trend: "Reports have spread to the effect that the notorious thief, Gared Abdallah, has been arrested. However, we have discovered that these reports are no more than rumours circulated among the public. Nevertheless, the authorities have dismissed the elders of the Bara'isa tribe from their positions as sheikhs because they had not turned Gared in nor would they reveal his whereabouts. Other sheikhs were appointed in their stead."

While the Gared incident exemplifies the punitive measures that eroded tribal solidarity, the story submitted by *Al-Ahram*'s correspondent in Beni Mazar illustrates how the sheikhs were rewarded when they cooperated. He reports, "His Royal Highness the khedive has bestowed his favour upon him the rank of *bey* and a pension of 15 pounds a month in recompense for his assistance in the apprehension and arrest of thieves." He also relates that another sheikh, Ali Ammar El-Masri, formed a posse of some of the fellow members of his tribe and "went out to lay an ambush to ensnare the criminal, Ali Haidar, also a member of his tribe, whom they apprehended and surrendered to the authorities." Evidently, Ali Ammar did not receive the reward he had expected, causing *Al-Ahram* to plead on his behalf, "He should be awarded the remuneration he so justly merits, as encouragement for him and incentive to others."

The newspaper also reports feuds that erupted among the tribes. On 16 November 1891, *Al-Ahram*'s correspondent in Minya describes an armed skirmish between the Burj and Ada'in tribes in which "there was much gunfire". It was only resolved "through the intervention of the mayor and the arrival of the chief of police at the head of a contingent of his soldiers." Also, from Beni Suef we read of a battle between the Msaza and the Beni Suleiman tribes. "Two were wounded, the perpetrators were arrested and the investigation is in progress," the correspondent sums up. We come across a third item from Zagazig. The article reports on a trail held "to hear the case of a murder that took place during a violent dispute between a gang from the Hanadi tribe and a gang from the Moussa tribe."

The following report from Damanhur, dated 3 June 1893, epitomises the tensions between the Bedouins and the *fellahin* that were characteristic of increased contact. "In the region of Nadiba, a peasant and an Arab were discussing who were better: the *fellahin* or the Bedouins. Their discussion degenerated into a heated quarrel with much profanity. Then the two antagonists traded blows until the *fellah* killed his adversary. The police are currently investigating the incident."

This account is interesting for a number of reasons. First of all there is the sense of pride we detect in the two parties' rivalry to prove the superiority of their own group. More relevant to our subject, however, is the fact that there appeared to be no question of tribal retribution against the family of the *fellah*.

Other *Al-Ahram* accounts offer further testimony to the growing feebleness of tribal solidarity and the increasing power of the policing agencies of government. On 17 October 1893, the correspondent in Damanhur reports that "a dispute erupted in the area of Mariout between the villagers and the Arabs over the theft of some animals, but the government moved quickly to dispatch a contingent of soldiers in order to prevent the outbreak of violence."

Another item from Kafr Al-Dawar, dated 22 April 1895, describes "a violent confrontation between the villagers of Al-Akraisha and a band of Arabs, in which the adversaries set upon each other with sticks and canes causing several serious injuries." He goes on to relate that "the district commissioner and a representative of the prosecution are currently investigating the incident and the wounded have been transferred to the municipal hospital for treatment."

These and similar incidents mark the end of Bedouin aloofness and independence and the beginning of their assimilation into the rural society and their amalgamation into the Egyptian whole, according to the process described by Dr. Gamal Hamdan.

Economic developments played an important part in this process, particularly as regards the Bedouins to the east of the Delta. Two important changes affected the economic and social profile of this region. The first was the Suez Canal, opened in 1869. The canal created a barrier to the movement of the Bedouins between the Eastern Desert and the Sinai, compelling them to lead a more sedentary life. The second was the spread of the railways to the countryside and, notably, the line passing through Zagazig and Tel Al-Kabir to Ismailia and Port Said. The improved communications with the more remote areas where the Bedouins resided were bound to encourage their absorption into the mainstream of Egyptian society.

The railway network and other advances in modern communications that were bringing the edges of the country closer together would alter the relationship between the central authorities and the Bedouins, as the government brought them under the umbrella of the agencies of a modern state. This is most evident in areas related to national defence.

According to a Supreme Decree issued on 13 March 1882, the Bedouins were given official exemption from the lottery system used to draft the national army. The decree read, "In observance of the concessions that have been previously granted to the Bedouins, so as to encourage them to settle and so as to offer incentive to improve their standards of living, there will be no alteration in the status of the current concessions, in accordance with which the Bedouins shall be exempted from military conscription."

Another area of national defence was to protect the cultivated lands from the hazards of the Nile floods. Canals, dams and dikes had to be routinely maintained and repaired. This task was undertaken by forced labour conscripted from among the rural inhabitants. The Bedouins were also out of reach of this conscription, as they only resided on the periphery of agricultural lands. Even when they began to settle and to own property, it tended to be on reclaimed land at the furthest reaches from the river.

The Bedouins had come to see these exemptions as fixed and unalterable rights. However, as the century drew to a close, the government did not share this opinion. *Al-Ahram* testifies to the government's attempts to change the status of the Bedouins with regard to national conscription.

"People pay a few piastres to a Bedouin sheikh for him to attest that they are members of his tribe and therefore exempt from military conscription and irrigation patrol," the newspaper reported. "The Bedouin rabble are indifferent to government authority and their impudence is such that they disdain every great deed and are contemptuous of their fellow man."

Such are the arguments cited in the newspaper to include the Bedouins in the national service. More than anything else, they suggest that the Bedouins had already become so much a part of society that the government believed that they should be subject to the same obligations as the rest of the Egyptian people.

Certainly the complaint submitted by a group of Bedouins living near Port Said is indicative of a more sedentary life and closer contact with the urban populations. They had objected to a government order prohibiting them from entering the city to sell dates as they had been doing for some time. The government rescinded the order. We learn of a similar complaint against the impediments the Ministry of Finance was causing to their livelihood in the fisheries of Manzala Lake. Their petition eloquently concludes, "Justice must prevail, otherwise Mazlum Pasha will have to issue a decree that will tell the Egyptian people that as long as he remains the minister of finance, his ministry will have no other pursuit than collecting people's hard-earned money, eroding their rights and pillaging the defenseless poor."

While claiming certain rights, the Bedouins strongly resisted government attempts to rescind their privileges and to bring them under tighter control. Although the government succeeded in implementing certain measures to regulate the lives of the Bedouins it had to defer others. The Ministry of Interior achieved the greatest progress. Its first step was to order a census of the Bedouin population and the demarcation of their places of residence. The tribal leaders commissioned to do this risked losing their position if they were negligent in their task. The ministry also ended the old system of electing tribal sheikhs. Henceforth, they would be selected via "a commission composed of mayors and Bedouin sheikhs who would convene in the directorate headquarters under the chairmanship of the provincial director." Once selected, they would be responsible for implementing the instructions issued by the provincial director regarding "the preservation of law and order, observance of the regulation governing vagabonds and second-time offenders and the prompt notification of the authorities concerning all that occurs within the area of their jurisdiction."

More important was the process of restructuring the direct administrative government of the tribes. According to *Al-Ahram* of 2 December 1895, the government "convened commissions in all the provinces in which a mayor or more was elected for each tribe. Each mayor would be served by other sheikhs in the capacity of division chiefs." The system was in fact implemented without a hitch in all the provinces, with the exception of Beheira, where "the sheikhs in the Nazla tribe objected to being division chiefs after they had been tribal leaders." They gave in eventually despite their objections.

At the same time, the Ministry of the Interior applied provisions for the protection of farms and villages to the Bedouins just as they were applied to the rest of the rural populace. The Bedouins objected that "we are the country's sentinels along the borders." *Al-Ahram*, in response, advised that the government "should settle the Bedouins in fixed housing and grant them ownership of property so that they could legitimately be subject to the laws and regulations affecting the rest of the population."

Ultimately, government policies did succeed in overcoming the Bedouin anomaly in Egyptian culture. Perhaps the most salient proof is that many Bedouins who had settled and taken government positions also became involved in the nationalist movement, either before World War I or in the 1919 Revolution. Lamloum El-Saadi, sheikh of the Fawaid tribe in Maghagha, Hamed El-Basil, mayor of the Ramah tribe in Fayoum and the El-Abaza family in Sharqiya province were in the vanguard of the Wafd, National and Liberal Constitutional parties. There could hardly be more tangible proof of the assimilation of the Bedouins.


The author is a renowned historian and a professor of modern history at Ain Shams University.

Forging new frontiers

As current plans for a Middle East market underscore Sinai's significance as a strategic passageway, South Sinai Governor Major-General Mamdouh El-Zoheiri talks to **Galal Nassar** about the Sinai development plan

In an effort to lure both investors and new settlers to South Sinai, the Committee for the Development of Sinai, headed by Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Planning Kamal El-Ganzouri, has devised a 23-year comprehensive plan to develop the governorate.

The plan, which aims at settling 600,000 citizens in South Sinai, involves both the private and public sectors. It is part of an LE75 billion investment for the development of North and South Sinai with the emphasis on "providing stability and an integrated lifestyle for the new inhabitants," and is scheduled to be completed in 2017, said Major General Mamdouh El-Zoheiri, the governor of South Sinai.

"Policies promoting tourism, industry and agriculture will be adopted in view of South Sinai's importance as a primarily touristic province," said El-Zoheiri, adding that land has been allotted at reasonable prices. Various credit facilities will be extended to investors.

To address the infrastructural needs of the region's new inhabitants, he said, "stations have already been built to solve the problems of water supply, electricity and desalination."

The plan includes LE48.1 billion for the North Sinai Governorate and LE26.1 billion for South Sinai.

In addition to the current initiatives, a new and important industrial planning phase has been launched east of the Suez Canal and in the Gulf of Suez, both are rich in mineral resources, said El-Zoheiri.

To get the ball rolling, the government will spearhead the development programme by undertaking several industrial projects as an incentive to lure domestic and international private sector investments in the region's industries.

The later stage of the plan envisages the establishment of a major electronic industrial base to promote exports. "This will be executed through assembly industries in South Sinai's cities where labour is inexpensive and abundant," he noted.

Investment will also be targeted at the agricultural sector where, said El-Zoheiri, there are 250,000 feddans which are arable, but lack a water supply. "We will allocate LE200 million for undertaking measures to store rainwater wasted during the annual floods, which reaches 150 million cubic metres annually," he said. Dams and barriers will be built to help the region's sandy soil retain and store water and increase the volume of water in wells, to be used in irrigation.

The new plan will also address air and naval transport, which will be upgraded. A study is underway to develop the international airport in Sharm Al-Sheikh. This airport currently can handle 1,100 tourists per hour. In addition, the airport at Saint Catherine and another in Al-Tor, are currently being upgraded to international airports capable of receiving larger airliners. Another airport between Dabab and Nuweiba will be constructed as well as one near Ras Mohamed. There is already an airport in the Negev, between Nuweiba and Taba.

Regarding port facilities, such as the port in Al-Tor, which is affiliated with the Authority for Red Sea Ports, is administratively ready for international traffic, but has yet to be marketed to international shipping firms.

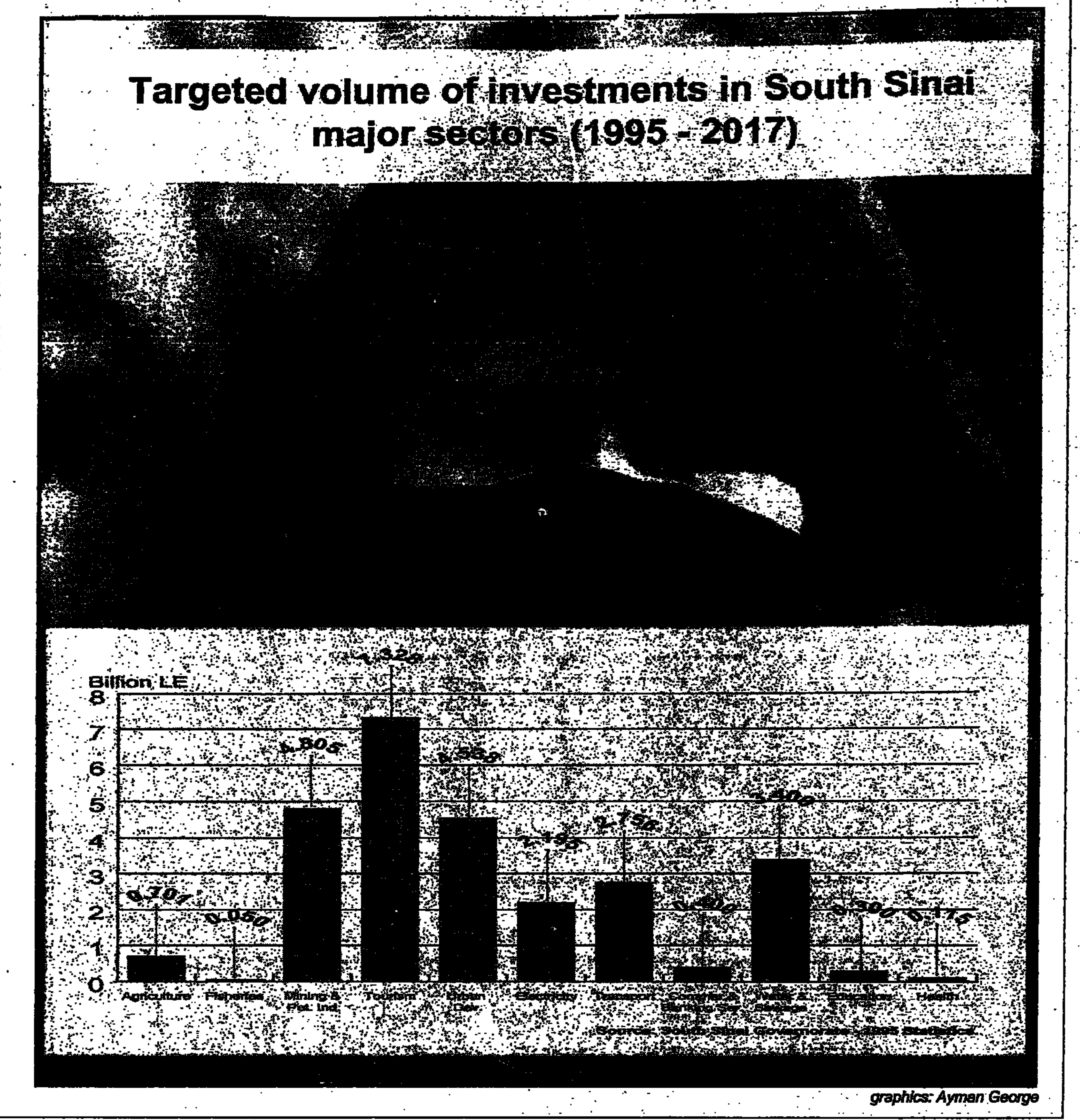
To meet the increasing demand for health services, the armed forces have constructed a large, specialised hospital in Al-Tor. The hospital owns three emergency helicopters. Investors have also been invited to build three private hospitals in Sharm Al-Sheikh.

"While the state will not be able to provide the needed LE26 billion over the next 23 years, as called for in the plan, it will undertake the initial, more difficult steps such as building a LE50 million road and setting up investment projects estimated at LE4-5 billion," said El-Zoheiri. The state will also provide LE3.4 billion for water and sewage projects, almost LE2.2 billion for electricity and energy projects and close to LE2.8 billion for transportation projects.

Although the plan is expected to result in the resettling of citizens from the Delta region to Sinai, "consideration has been given to the native inhabitants of Sinai by providing them with stability and the opportunity to share in these development projects," he said. "There are currently 87 Bedouin communities who, by presidential decree, have been given possession of the lands they have settled on," El-Zoheiri noted.

Urban planning undertaken in these communities has taken into consideration local customs, as well as architectural styles. Moreover, electrical and educational services, in addition to other facilities, have been fully extended to 43 of these communities. Priority has been given to larger communities, as opposed to smaller ones, some of which are made up of only 12 inhabitants.

A good deal of work has already been done on the infrastructure in Sinai. The Ahmed Hamdi Tunnel has linked Sinai to the Delta. A movable bridge was installed by the armed forces in Al-Qantara in the Suez Canal zone. In addition, a bridge across the Suez Canal is currently being planned, with Japanese assistance. The canal governorates have also begun to establish industrial free trade zones east of the canal in Sinai. The Al-Salam Canal, which will transport Nile water to Sinai, is currently under construction.



graphics: Ayman George

Partnership, priorities and pragmatism

The Egyptian-EU partnership agreement may be a bitter pill that Egypt must swallow, but in the long run, experts say, should investments increase, the gains could more than compensate for the pain. **Niveen Wahish** reports

Despite fears about the consequences of a partnership agreement with Europe, Egyptian experts concede that for lack of another alternative, Egypt must join. At a seminar held in Cairo last week, participants from Egypt, Jordan, the European Union (EU), Tunisia and Israel met to evaluate the validity of bilateral partnerships with Europe. Discussions highlighted the impact the EU agreement will have on the various sectors of the Egyptian economy. The conference devoted a session to examine the cases of Tunisia and Israel which recently signed their partnership agreements with Europe. Egypt and Jordan are currently negotiating individual bilateral accords with the EU.

The two-day conference entitled, "European Partnership and Regional Cooperation, Case Studies in the Middle East", was organised by the Friedrich Naumann Foundation, in cooperation with the Egyptian Society of Economic Journalists and the Association for Public Policy Analysis.

Participants reached the conclusion that although the proposed partnership agreement will do away with the benefits currently enjoyed by Egypt under the 1977 cooperation agreement, there is no alternative but to sign up for partnership.

Mohamed Farid Khamis, head of the 10th of Ramadan Investors' Association, said, "Today we export to Europe at conditions better than those proposed in the first draft of the partnership agreement. Moreover, the Egyptian budget will be deprived of the income it gains from the customs duties levied on European imports."

Khamis, expressing the industrialists' point of view, said that since it is the only means of developing the Egyptian economy, Egyptian industrialists are all for the partnership which will give them access to the European market. However, he said that Egyptian industrialists are demanding that the partnership be forged according to Egyptian conditions.

He also said that the moves to liberalise trade have come at a bad time. Sixty per cent of Egyptian industry is facing internal problems, and most Egyptian factories have not reached a size that enables them to compete on the international market. Khamis also pointed out that production in Egypt is encumbered by burdens with which their European counterparts are not obliged to cope.

He expressed his confidence that the final draft of the partnership agreement will be satisfactory to all parties, noting that an unbalanced relationship is bound to fail. In addition, he said he was satisfied of the results of the negotiations so far. "The negotiators have been able to guarantee a gradual lifting of tariffs according to a priority of products. They have also been able to secure the relationship between liberalising trade between the two parties and the rehabilitation of Egyptian industry," Khamis said.

Ibrahim Fawzi, Egypt's minister of industry, said that this is Egypt's last chance to incorporate the technological advances of the developed world into its industrial infrastructure. "At present, the benefits of the partnership should not be calculated by forecasting losses or gains; it is a strategic choice," he said

Tayseer Abdel-Jaber, a Jordanian economic expert and former minister of labour, said that the Egyptian economy should now make the most of what it has. He stressed the importance of the export sector in offsetting the negative effect of the partnership. "Industrialists must make the most of products which enjoy a comparative advantage in European markets rather than try to compete with European goods in areas where they have not got a chance," Abdel-Gaber said.

Saad Nassar, consultant to the minister of agriculture, explaining the state of Egyptian agricultural exports under the current cooperation agreement, said that some Egyptian agricultural products enjoy a 100 per cent customs exemption, but only according to preset quotas and in specific seasons. Within the partnership negotiations, the Europeans have shown flexibility in agreeing in principle to the gradual liberalisation of agricultural products. They have also expressed their willingness to increase the agricultural quota, extending the period they are allowed entry and permitting more items to enjoy these exemptions.

Nassar said that these concessions are very important, especially in light of the fact that Egypt has, in the '90s, adopted an export-oriented agricultural policy, rather than the previous policy aimed at self-sufficiency in agricultural products.

Another point of controversy surrounding the proposed Egyptian-European partnership agreement is that of financial assistance. While the 1977 cooperation agreement provided Egypt with a set amount of easy-term loans and grants, the draft partnership agreement takes away this security. The EU will be devoting about ECU4 billion in grants to the whole southern Mediterranean region, in addition to a similar amount to be made available in the form of loans by the European Investment Bank. However, each country's share will be allocated according to its ability to present viable projects worthy of funding.

Admitting to the serious repercussions of the partnership agreement, Michael McGeever, head of the European Commission (EC) delegation in Egypt, said that "the major burden of change will be borne by the Egyptian economy and by the Egyptian society at large. No amount of international grant assistance is, or could be, sufficiently available to meet or compensate for that burden." However, he said "the benefits will have to be sought in the overall success of the process itself."

The only means of overcoming Egypt's losses is by creating the economic environment that attracts investments. According to Industry Minister Fawzi, "once the Egyptian market is open, capital will pour in."

But while McGeever also believes that this is the solution, he pointed out that "foreign investment will only follow when Egypt's own domestic investors have shown much more conviction than they have to date in investing in their own backyard."

He said that the main issue on which the success or failure of the partnership hinges, is what will make Egyptian or foreign investors keen to invest in Egypt.

Time to team up

Will the EU-Mediterranean agreements encourage inter-Arab economic cooperation? **Samia Nkrumah** seeks an answer

The final session of last week's conference on "European Partnership and Regional Cooperation" was devoted to discussions on the nature of Egyptian-Jordanian relations in the light of regional changes. This session hammered home the message that partnerships with the European Union (EU) are no substitute for inter-Arab integration. At the very least, Arab bilateral cooperation is a gateway to future regional integration.

In that spirit, Egypt and Jordan agreed to draw up a free trade agreement with each other before the conclusion of their respective bilateral partnership agreements with the EU.

A free trade agreement would enable the two countries to benefit fully from the provisions of the EU partnership agreements. The two countries could jointly produce industrial items like half-processed goods or spare parts and export them to Europe.

Under a free trade agreement, customs duties would be reduced gradually so that commodities would eventually be duty-free. In addition, there would be free transfer of capital and labour. The 10-year-old trade protocol between Jordan and Egypt only helped promote trade between the two countries to a very limited degree. It was viewed by many economists as a failure and many are now calling for the protocol to be terminated and for free trade to be imposed for all goods.

Egypt is already a member of the World Trade Organisation (WTO) and Jordan, which has applied for membership, is expected to join in a few years. WTO membership automatically renders bilateral protocols ineffective as members are expected to liberalise trade on the global level.

The trade flow between Egypt and Jordan has so far been in Egypt's favour. Egyptian exports to Jordan amounted to $45 million in 1994, while Jordanian exports to Egypt did not exceed $15 million in the same year. Currently, Jordanian investments in Egypt are in the region of $110 million, while Egyptian investment in Jordan remains minimal.

There is a wider scope for cooperation in trade between both states, particularly in pharmaceuticals, garments and certain agricultural products. There is also potential for greater investment in chemicals and raw materials. But the real obstacles to increased exports of goods are the lack of competitiveness in terms of quality and price, the disregard for regulations such as guarantees, the unavailability of samples and delays in delivery.

Nevertheless, Jordan and Egypt are engaged in a number of joint projects. The electricity grid covering five countries including Syria, Turkey, Israel and the Palestinian territories was originally started by Jordan and Egypt before the 1991 Madrid peace conference. Jordan and Egypt have also agreed to make mutual concessions in transport taxes in Aqaba and Suez. In addition, the seven-year-old joint Al-Jisr Al-Arabi company has facilitated the transfer of labour and tourists between Aqaba and Egyptian ports. In addition, a joint company for investment and development between both states is injecting capital into agricultural and animal products.

It is no secret that Europe is calling the tune in its proposed association with the southern Mediterranean countries. Many agree that without greater Arab integration Arab economies will not benefit from being incorporated in Europe's trading structure. In other words, perhaps Europe's call for free trade between the Mediterranean countries will trigger greater Arab economic integration.

Market report — Kablat disappoints investors

WHILE the value of trading on the stock exchange for the week ending 14 December increased from LE41.6 million to LE58.5 million, the General Market Index suffered a moderate decrease of 0.01 points to close at 212.71 points.

This decline was mirrored in the performance of the manufacturing sector index which slipped by 0.84 points to close at 289.85 points. The Egyptian Cable Company (Kablat) found itself in the spotlight this week after announcing its annual profits. Kablat's shares fell by LE5.95 per share to level off at LE100. The company announced a dividend of LE8 per share, disappointing investors who had expected the company to distribute a higher share dividend. Shareholders of Egyptian Chemical Industries Company stock (Kima) were also disappointed as the company's shares lost 14.8 per cent of their value to close at LE10.71. Shares of the Extracted Oils Company fell by LE2.49 to close at LE144 per share.

Other companies, however, had a better week. The Suez Company for Bags was the sector's big winner of the week. Its shares rose by LE12 per share, or 14.28 per cent of their per share value, to top off at LE96. The Paints and Chemical Industries Company's shares continued on their upward trend, gaining LE10 to close at LE695 per share. The newly-privatised Helwan Portland Cement Company's shares inched up by LE0.58 to close at LE36.5 per share. The company also recorded the highest number of transactions, trading 188,000 shares, or 18.34 per cent of the week's overall trading.

Similar gains were accrued by the financial sector, whose index gained 3.42 points to level off at 221.51 points. The Faisal Islamic Bank gained LE5 per share to close at LE29.5 per share. On the other hand, shares of the Commercial International Bank (CIB) slipped by LE1.65 to close at LE514 per share.

In all, the shares of 23 companies increased in value, 29 decreased and 49 remained unchanged.

The General Market Index

Sun 10/12	Mon 11/12	Tue 12/12	Wed 13/12	Thu 14/12

(Vertical axis: 0, 50, 100, 150, 200, 250)

Edited by **Ghada Ragab**

UNCTAD applauds TNCs

INCREASED activity on the part of transnational corporations (TNC) is having a positive effect on international economic integration, said the United Nations Conference on Trade and Development's (UNCTAD) 1995 World Investment Report which was released last week.

The report, entitled, *Transnational Corporations and Competitiveness*, says that global sales of 250,000 foreign affiliates of 40,000 TNCs have exceeded $5 trillion. In countries where the macroeconomic environment is conducive to free trade, foreign direct investment (FDI) from TNCs, as well as smaller firms that are rapidly expanding their operations on an international level, could improve the competitiveness of indigenous firms.

The report calculated total FDI flows by TNCs in 1995 to be about $235 billion, a $9 billion increase from 1994's level of $226 billion.

Governments worldwide, recognising the benefits accrued by TNC investments, are steering economies increasingly in the direction of liberalisation, added the report.

Egypt-Israel trade boost

A REPORT prepared by the Egyptian Commercial Representation Office (CRO) in Israel said that Egyptian exports to Israel, from January-September 1995 reached $39.2 million, a 75 per cent increase over 1994's total of $22.4 million.

The value of Egyptian imports from Israel increased from $12.2 million in 1994 to $22.7 million in 1995, an 86 per cent increase. Egyptian exports to Israel include leather products, plastics, marble, foodstuffs and chemicals; while imports from Israel include shoes, foodstuffs, machinery, equipment, metal products and precious stones such as diamonds.



Clashes across the archipelago

In the Bab Al-Mandab Straits, the boundary between past and present is not often crossed — for good reason, writes **Gamal Nkrumah**

Three islands — Hanish Al-Kubra, Hanish Al-Sughra and Jabel Zogar — dominate the northern reaches of the Bab Al-Mandab Straits which separates Africa from Asia and the Red Sea from the Indian Ocean. Back in 1967 when Britain withdrew from what was to become the former People's Democratic Republic of Yemen (PDRY), and relinquished its control of the strategic Yemeni port of Aden, it refused to hand the Hanish Archipelago over to the Marxist authorities who then ran its former colony. That was at the height of the Cold War, but the crisis lingers on.

Four Israeli-made Eritrean speedboats sped across the Red Sea to Hanish Al-Kubra island where some 500 Yemeni *troops were garrisoned last Sunday*. Israel had recently supplied Eritrea with patrol boats and telecommunications equipment. Russian-made Yemeni Sukhoi *Su-20 fighter* bombers flew sorties over the disputed islands. Russia is desperate to sell its arms to anyone, and that includes one of the former Soviet Union's *client states* — the now defunct PDRY. Today's Republic of Yemen inherited a colonial legacy of *disputed borders and apocryphal archipelago* claims.

The Eritrean President Isaias Afeworki was rushed to hospital in Israel last year when he suffered an attack of meningitis. His speedy recovery ushered a new and warmer phase of Eritrean-Israeli relations. Ali Abdullah Saleh, the President of Yemen, has aired his concern about alleged Eritrean plans to develop tourism facilities on the archipelago with Israeli help. His country, united in May 1990, has been embroiled in some of the most per*sistent Red Sea and Arabian Peninsula* flashpoints precisely because of its colonial heritage.

It is not long since the close of the colonial chapter in the Red Sea and the creation of ancient nations anew. And, there is no more miserable creation on earth than *one betrayed by its liberator. The Yemeni* Ambassador to Egypt, Ahmad Mohamed Luqman, expressed his shock and indignation *at the Eritreans' claim* on the Hanish Archipelago. "I received the Eritrean Ambassador [Amru] in my office only five days ago," he said in an interview with *Al-Ahram Weekly*. "Eritrea is our neighbour and we normally have friendly relations with Asmara. We supported the Eritrean people's struggle for national self-determination. During the liberation struggle the troops of the [now ruling] Eritrean People's Liberation Front (EPLF) launched their attacks on the then occupying Ethiopian forces from the Yemeni archipelago that Eritrea now claims as its own."

"This is no African-Arab dispute: this is a crisis that concerns only Yemen and Eritrea," Ambassador *Luqman said*. "Yemen has good relations with all the Horn of Africa nations."

A high-level Yemeni *delegation* headed by the Yemeni Foreign Minister Abdul-Karim Al-Iryani and the Interior Minister Hussein Arab was despatched to the Eritrean capital Asmara last month following the deployment of Yemeni troops on the Hanish Archipelago.

The Arab League, which backs Yemen's claim over Hanish Al-Kubra, called on Eritrea to vacate the island. Eritrea which gained independence from Ethiopia in 1993 has consistently declined to join the Cairo-based Arab League even though Arabic is the second official language of the country and a substantial percentage of Eritreans speak Arabic either as a first or second language. Furthermore, Eritrea's *neighbours to the south — Djibouti* and Somalia — have joined the Arab League even though their percentage of Arabic-*speakers are far fewer.*

According to Mohamed Ali Amru, the Eritrean Chargé d'Affaires in Cairo, Eritrea "hoped to reach an early agreement on the ground rules" governing the dispute. Asmara also wanted to "expedite the negotiations" but "the Yemeni delegation stalled the talks insisting that their mandate was to discuss sovereignty over the Hanish Al-Kubra island and not the [entire] archipelago."

"While Eritrea was doing its utmost to resolve the dispute through dialogue and international legality, units of the Yemen Armed Forces resorted to provocative acts of harassment and intimidation," Amru said. Asmara protested what it called "unnecessary [Yemeni] provocation" and called for the convening of a bilateral meeting which indeed was later held in *Asmara on 7 December. The meeting* was postponed to after the holy month of Ramadan in February.

Amru went on to explain that on 15 December, Yemeni troops attacked Eritrean forces stationed on the Hanish Archipelago. "The Eritrean forces have managed to thwart the provocation, taking prisoner over 180 Yemeni soldiers and destroying one helicopter in the process," the Eritrean Chargé d'Affaires said. He added that the Eritreans lost six men. The Yemenis want to know when their troops are to be returned home. *Ambassador Luqman* denied any knowledge of Israeli involvement in the current crisis.

Crescent rising over Turkey

Tipped to win most seats in Turkey's parliament elections this week, the Welfare Party is keen to steer the state eastwards. Julie Till profiles the Islamists' programme

Turkey is going to the polls this week. The party tipped to win most seats in the new parliament is the Refah or Welfare Party. Founded in 1983 by its current Chairman Necemettin Erbakan, the party espouses an Islamic solution to the country's ills — at least as far as the Turkish secular constitution will allow.

And that is what has set the pundits pondering. How have the Islamists *made such remarkable strides in such a short space of time? The party's* stronghold has traditionally been the underdeveloped villages and small towns of eastern Anatolia. But as the last test of Turkey's political waters — the municipal elections of March 1994 — showed the Islamists have transformed themselves into a mass based national party.

During those elections the Welfare Party gathered 19 per cent of votes nation wide, compared with the 20 per cent won by Prime Minister Tansu Ciller's True Path Party. Perhaps most surprising of all was that the party also won victories in the big cities. Both cosmopolitan Istanbul and the country's capital Ankara now have Islamist mayors.

In part this is because of the rural drift to the cities, spurred on by the search for work and the desire to escape the 11 year old war between the Turkish state and Kurdish separatists in the south east. In the 1994 elections *the Islamists won most of the municipalities* in the Kurdish areas. This was partly as a result of a boycott by the pro-Kurdish, now banned, Democracy Party and partly because of the Islamists' recognition of the cultural and ethnic identity of the Kurds.

According to Omar Farouq, head of the Welfare Party's foreign relations public information office in Ankara, "There is no Kurdish problem because all citizens are equal. The Welfare Party emphasises the need to give complete freedom in using local languages in schools, television and radio broadcasts."

More generally, Farouq believes that the party has been successful because it has tapped into popular disillusionment over the running of the economy and the failure to keep pace with the West. It is no surprise to observers that the devaluation of the Turkish currency, high inflation, *falling real wages and rising unemployment have created fertile ground* for public discontent with the status quo.

Similarly, the corruption charges that have become the daily fare of Turkey's newspapers, including allegations levelled at both Prime Minister Ciller and leader of the opposition Motherland Party Mesut Yilmaz, are hardly designed to bolster public confidence in Turkey's traditional parties.

Yet, despite its call for a "Just Economic Order" the Welfare Party is not against the free market policies of the current coalition government. Farouq emphasises that the party believes in privatisation "in all areas". Its objection is directed at who is doing the buying. "We refuse the policies of a government that sold, in the name of privatisation, all the strategic factories of the state to foreign companies according to the IMF programme," *he said. The present government, charges Farouq, is guilty of* "handing over Turkey to the decisions of the IMF".

The party's economic programme, according to Turkish scholar Haldun Gulap writing in the *Middle East Report* in August of this year, seeks to promote free competition and profit, while excluding what it regards as the unsavoury aspects of western capitalism: interest, monopoly and central planning. He quotes Party Chairman Erbakan who describes the Welfare Party as "the only real pro-private initiative party". The economic order envisaged by Erbakan, says Gulap, sounds "very much like an egalitarian petty-bourgeois paradise, a utopian society made up of individual entrepreneurs."

This Islamist-nationalist outlook also colours the way in which the Welfare Party wants to do business outside its borders. The party is high*ly sceptical of the newly-signed* customs union with the European Union which is due to come into effect in January. In fact, according to Farouq, if the party comes to power it will review the tariff agreement and hold a referendum on it.

For Prime Minister Ciller the political and cultural spin-offs of the customs union are as important as the economic benefits. As European member states debated Turkey's human rights record, Ciller warned them that: "Fundamentalism is only going to be a threat *if Turkey is left out of* Europe."

While no party, whatever its political colours, would turn away from the *$22 billion of trade* which business between Turkey and the EU currently brings, the Welfare Party is against putting all its economic, political and social eggs in one basket. Turkey needs to look both east and west for markets, argues Farouq.

As for further integration into the EU, again politics is paramount. Instead, of trying to join the Europeans, argues Erbakan, Turkey should lift all tariffs with Islamic states as a prelude to an Islamic Common Market. Brussels had better watch out, then. *According to Farouq*: "We do not see that it is to the benefit of the Turkish people to be a minority in the decision making process [of the EU] and, in fact, the people do not want to play any *role in it*."



In the West Bank town of Bethlehem, the countdown to Israeli redeployment and the first Christmas under Palestinian self-rule has begun *(photos:AFP and Reuters)*

League beleaguered by money and politics

Rasha Saad takes account of the mounting financial difficulties threatening the Arab League

Earlier this month, news reports announced the failure of the Arab League to pay the salaries of its 765 employees for the month of November. During the last two years, the League has closed its offices in Athens, Nairobi, Dakar, Rome, Tokyo, Ottawa and Buenos Aires. Mounting financial difficulties and a diminishing role in regional affairs have led political observers to question the organ*isation's viability.*

Though some observers believe the current financial crisis may be the beginning of the end, Abdel-Sami' Zeineddin, former head of the Sudanese department in the Egyptian foreign ministry, does not believe these difficulties will lead to the organisation's collapse. "The League will not collapse because of financial problems, especially since so many rich oil countries are among its members. Its downfall would only be due to political reasons."

Reports attribute the current deficit to nearly $80 million in outstanding membership dues. Gamil Mattar, director of the Arab Centre for Developmental and Futuristic *Studies* and a former top official of the League, notes that member states, whose contributions constitute a major part of the organisation's budget, protest that the League earmarks more funds for employee wages than for projects. Other members allege that the League is overspending unjustifiably. Still other members argue that their dues are more than they can afford. Mattar underlined the similarity of the Arab League's financial problems to those of the United Nations.

Adnan Omran, assistant secretary-general of the League, refused to comment on the financial problems. However, he noted a "confused and dispersed Arab will", saying that many Arab countries are more attracted to sub-regional gatherings which detract from *unified Arab effort.*

The League's current financial problems are not the organisation's only woe. Critics argue that the Arab League has not lived up to Arabs' hopes and aspirations and has failed to effectively solve regional disputes.

Mattar says these shortcomings are rooted in the League's dimin*ishing role. During the struggle* against Israel, the organisation was the base of Arab solidarity. But, according to Mattar, since the seventies. "The voice of the Arab League has been silenced and any attempts to effect change within the regional system were tackled outside the League. Now that changes in the region are occurring and the organisation's role has diminished, it is now simply the remains of a notion of Arab *solidarity.*"

Recent changes in the region have provided room for added international influence — another reason, according to Zein Eddin, why the League's standing has waned.

Egypt's role as regional leader is to some extent dependent upon the successes of the League. A *deterioration in performance* would reflect poorly on the organisation's home country. "Egypt's role as international player depends on its position within Arab circles," explained Mattar.

"If we let the house of the Arabs collapse now, this means that the leading role in the Middle East will be carried out by a non-Arab power. The League should start from now preparing itself for the post Arab-Israeli peace phase," admonished Zein Eddin.

He believes that Egypt does not fear a new Middle East order. *However, it is not ready* "to sacrifice what is in hand for something which is still far away. The League is the only shield through which Egypt can protect the Arab interests," he said.

Meanwhile, Zeineddin suggested that Arabs support the League as a co-ordinator between inter-Arab and foreign interests. *However, according to some observers,* the will of the Arab League and the will of member states are at odds. Until the opposing wills meet on common ground, the League's future will hang in the balance.

Beirut's hotels battle it out

The Lebanese government's ultimatum to rebuild or face confiscation has Beirut's hotels up in arms. **Zeina Khodr** reports from Beirut

Owners of war-ravaged hotels in the cen*tre of Beirut* face confiscation of their property unless they start renovation work by the end of 1996. Among the hotels threatened is the St. George's Hotel which, until it was reduced to ruins during the civil war, was one of Beirut's most famous landmarks.

The ultimatum issued by the Lebanese government is designed to speed up the development of downtown Beirut — where most of the five-star hotels are situated — in line with the general reconstruction process in the country. The area adjacent to the "hotel district" was the green line during the protracted civil war and is being rebuilt by Lebanon's powerful property *developing company*, Solidere.

However, hoteliers argue that the problem is not their *unwillingness* to rebuild their shattered hotels, but rather the lack of funds. They complain that it is difficult to lure *much-needed* foreign investment. The Phoenicia Hotel plans to embark on its reconstruction work early next year, but *Marwan* Salha, a board member, said the difficulty is getting hold of enough cash to finance the project.

"The problem is that *local* funding is non-existent and foreign investment will not be forthcoming until there is stability," *Salha* said. "Foreign companies and investors have to be convinced that the security situation in the south of the country *is stable. Every time the situation* in the south escalates, international companies have doubts. Once a comprehensive peace is achieved in the Middle East region, I believe foreign investment will start to pour into Lebanon."

But for the moment financial investors still have doubts about the economic viability of the hotel trade in Lebanon. "It is not easy to convince them that once we borrow money, these hotels will be able to reap profits," he added.

Not everyone is unhappy with the decision. Khaled Suliman, the head of the Syndicate of Hotel Owners, supported the government's ultimatum describing it as a positive move which will assist Beirut to regain its former glory. Pierre Salameh, the *secretary-general of the syndicate of hotel* owners, also expressed satisfaction with previous government decisions which he *felt were beneficial to the hotel sector.* "Customs duties on hotel furniture and equipment have been reduced. We do not *have to pay more* than two per cent on the equipment we need," he said. "The government has also evicted squatters from the hotels."

But Salha, while praising the government for adopting such measures, criticised the latest decision. "The cabinet cannot put time limits without understanding the difficulties this sector is facing. I believe a dialogue should have taken place before the ultimatum was issued."

Other international hotel-chains have started to conduct preliminary studies for reconstruction, but now there is a deadline hanging over them. "If we do not start rebuilding we may lose the hotel," explained *the Hilton Hotel's* representative in Beirut, Haidar Wahhabe. According to Wahhabe, *the government's recent decision serves* the interests of Solidere and not the hotels. Critics of Solidere have complained about *the process of expropriating property* which underlies the company's plans for rebuilding Beirut. If the hotels are con*fiscated*, Solidere will be a leading contender to take over and develop them.

Meanwhile, the management of the St. George's Hotel complains that government bureaucracy is itself holding up the reconstruction process. Fadi Khoury, the owner and general manager of the hotel, wants to begin rebuilding but he is still waiting for the permit. "The government and the municipality have deliberately procrastinated over the granting of the licence. If they want us to commence work, they should not be delaying the process of issuing the licence," Khoury said.

The hotel also complains that Solidere has exceeded the boundaries set out by parliament. "*Solidere wants to build the* Beirut marina in the same area as the St. George has intended to build its own marina since 1960," Khoury said. "If Solidere wants to build a marina, it must do so in conjunction with the St. George. We can build a marina, a small marina in front of the hotel, without being an obstruction to Solidere or to the development of the country."

A government decree issued last year granted St. George's Hotel the permission to reclaim 12,835 square metres of land currently under the sea and close to the hotel. Solidere had objected to this decree on the grounds that it ran contrary to its master plan to rebuild the Beirut Central District. Solidere's plan, however, prevents the hotel from utilising the reclaimed land.

Saad Khaled, the head of the Beirut Urban Planning Council, said the conflict is clear. "*The plans show that the jetty of the* Beirut marina overlaps with that of the St. George's marina," he said.

Khoury added that another decree issued by the cabinet last month dealing with the area surrounding the St. George was to the *detriment of the hotel since the view will* be obstructed by a road as well as the Beirut marina's eight metre high jetty.

The plan also shows that the hotel will be surrounded by a wide pier and roads. "It is intended to complement Solidere's downtown Beirut *projects and it completes* Solidere's wish to link the eastern and western areas of the Beirut marina by an access road that stretches across *and in* front of the actual hotel property and separates it from the water front," Khoury said. "I am willing to look for a solution, but one that is fair."

Khoury added that he will launch an international campaign in a last-ditch attempt to save his hotel. "I will search for influential personalities who stayed at the hotel before the war. I will encourage them to assist me in any way possible...It will be a public outcry for assistance," he said. "The hotel is a symbol of Beirut. We *believe like everybody else that the hotel* is a landmark. It has existed since the 1920s and its unique architecture will be *preserved*."

Light shed on Islamabad

Pakistani Foreign Minister Serdar Asef Ahmed Ali paints a sympathetic portrayal of Pakistani democracy and argues that his country's reputation has not been irreparably compromised by last month's suicide bombing of the Egyptian Embassy in Islamabad. He talks in an exclusive interview with **Gamal Nkrumah**

Can we nail, once and for all, the myth that Islam and terrorism go hand in hand? Is Pakistan where the battle to dispel the myth will be finally decided? Can Egypt be of assistance? If the myth persists, then the political and economic consequences for Pakistan, Egypt and the entire Muslim world could be dire. The ability of Pakistan to clamp down on the terrorists is a crucial test. Its ability to do so within the confines of its limited resources and nascent democratic system will shed light on possible solutions to an intractable problem.

For Egypt, the most visible sign that Pakistan is serious in its endeavour to collaborate closely with Egypt in its battle with terrorists is the visit this week of Pakistan's Foreign Minister Serdar Ali to Cairo. Pakistan's resolve to step up the fight to track down the terrorists who masterminded the Egyptian Embassy bombing in Islamabad on 19 November has never been called into question. Still, a visit by a top-notch Pakistani official was, dare one say, reassuring.

More important was the search for common ground between Cairo and Islamabad. Pakistan is unique in that it is a country whose genesis is religious exclusion and whose *raison d'être* is deeply rooted in Islam. Egypt is a country whose future is forged in its past — one that is singularly multifaceted. Yet the two nations are developing countries of the South that appear to have had more than their fair share of entanglements with terrorism bearing the name of Islam.

To the public at large, the visit shed little light on Pakistan's undoubtedly relentless pursuit of those who mounted the attack on the Egyptian Embassy in Islamabad — security considerations, no doubt. There is still no end in sight of the surprise missions of suicide bombers who strike as swiftly as lightning, leaving death and destruction in their wake. "The investigations into the bombings are still going on and we are keeping our Egyptian counterparts well informed," the visiting minister said.

Two suicide bombers were killed in last month's attack on the Egyptian Embassy in Islamabad. "We are holding one suspect in custody," Serdar Ali disclosed. "He is a Canadian national of Egyptian origin who was caught on the Afghan-Pakistani border. He is suspected of buying explosives and devices which were not made in Pakistan and must have cost a lot of money." The suspect, Ahmed Said Khadar, is ostensibly a humanitarian worker.

"We have taken unprecedented safety measures to ensure the security of foreign missions in Islamabad. As you might know, Islamabad is normally a peaceful city. There is very little crime ixIslamabad. We were shocked when this happeed. We must also know that terrorist attacks and suiide bombings are a common occurrence in Ameica and Europe too," the Pakistani foreign ministerremonstrated. "Remember Oklahoma, Paris and Beirut — even New York." Pakistan, according tothe Pakistani foreign minister, is as unfazed by theerrorists as Egypt is.

Pakistan's foreign minister had just visited the Guinean capital, Conakry, to attend a meeting of the Organisation of the Islamic Conference. "We adopted economic, social and political resolutons concerning our immediate problems. Bold decisions on Kashmir, Bosnia and the Middle East were taken. The image of Islam was the main theme though," Serdar Ali said. Was the issue of combating terrorism raised in Conakry? "No it wasnot raised, either in the official meetings or in the plenary sessions. But had Egypt raised the matter, Pakistan would have supported any move of that nature," the minister replied.

An Oxford-educated son of a prominent landowning family, Serdar Asef Ahmed Ali "wored zealously in the Muslim League" for the creation of Pakistan under the leadership of the countr's founder, Quaid-i-Azam Muhammad Ali Jinnah. Pakistan celebrates its 50th independence anniversry in 1997. Even though the country gained independence on 14 August 1947, Pakistan's natioal day falls on 23 March, for on that day in 1940 the Muslims of India decided to found a state of their own. The Muslim League formally adopted a resolution to that effect in Lahore — now the country's second largest city and capital of its largst province, Punjab.

"With a population of over 130 million, we are the ninth largest country in the world. Therefre, the world of Islam looks to Pakistan for guidace and support. Pakistan has traditionally advocaed Muslim causes, [worked tirelessly] for the independence of many Muslim states and suppoed the right to self-determination of many Muslim people — including the Palestinians, the Bosnians ad the Kashmiris. The role Pakistan plays is internationally recognised today because of three factors: our Muslim nationhood, our democratic system and our open market economy," Serdar Ali said.

"The Islamic Ideology Council is composed of Islamic scholars or jurists who are of considerable national and international standing," he explaird. "That body ensures that the Pakistani legal systm adheres to the *Shari'a*. We are the Islamic Repulic of Pakistan but we have a completely democratic system and an independent judiciary," he said.

"We are also a bridge between the world of Islam and the industrial world. We have a free media and public exchanges between the government and the leaders of the opposition are commonplace. These exchanges prove that our country has matured politically. We have always said that we need reserved seats for women in parliament. Women took part in the independence movement. Only those with rigid Islamic views want to bar women from politics," Serdar Ali explained.

"There is both the need to correct some institutional and political distortions and to make our system even more democratic. The powers of the chief executive in the country, the prime minister, are shared with the president. The problem is that the president is not elected and is not mandated by the people through a popular vote. The prime minister is elected directly by the Pakistani people, but the non-elected president has the power to dissolve the National Assembly," he said.

"Democracy in Pakistan is healthy. There are riots in London and in Paris. Yes, there is a bad situation in Karachi; one political party has decided to use force to win concessions. But we will not be intimidated. The Mohajir Qawmi Movement (MQM) has to stop terrorism. We are involved in negotiations with them and they are welcome to join the political process in Pakistan," the visiting minister stressed.

"The *Shari'a* needs to be adjusted through the concept of *ijtihad* [interpretation of the Qur'an and Sunna by Muslim scholars known for integrity]. The people of Pakistan believe in moderation and that is why the Islamists had a very poor showing in the last general elections. The Pakistani people have always rejected extremists — including extreme Islamists," he said. Political instability in Pakistan tests both donors' and investors' faith in the country.

As minister of state for economic affairs, Serdar Ali proved instrumental in the establishment of close ties between Pakistan and the Commonwealth of Independent States and today he sees cementing ties with the former Soviet Central Asian republics as of critical concern to Pakistan. "The Economic Cooperation Organisation — grouping Iran, Pakistan, Turkey, the Central Asian republics and Afghanistan — is beginning to emerge very slowly as a viable economic bloc," Serdar Ali said.

"The situation in Afghanistan represents a danger to the entire region not just to us in Pakistan," the foreign minister said. "Our policy towards Afghanistan is based on the following: one, the unity and territorial integrity of Afghanistan; two, non-interference in its internal affairs; three, upholding neutrality towards all parties in the conflict; and fourth, encouraging the process of peace and reconciliation."

He spoke about Pakistan's hope that a broad-based and representative government will be formed in Afghanistan soon. He said that at the moment Afghanistan had a "narrow-based government". The Pakistani foreign minister added that the government in Afghanistan was composed primarily of representatives of a single ethnic group — the Tajiks. "The Tajiks represent only a fifth of the population of Afghanistan," Serdar Ali said.

"The Central Asian republics have great potential because the largest deposits of oil and gas are in this region. The largest irrigated agricultural potential is to be found in this region," he said. "We buy cotton and wheat from them. We are thinking of constructing oil and gas pipelines." The visiting minister explained that Pakistani ports could in future be the main outlets for Central Asian exports. "Of course trade is not what it should be because Afghanistan has not settled down as yet," he said.

The glue of the Iranian-Pakistani axis is a mutual determination to give new impetus to political Islam as well as good neighbourliness. And bilateral ties are cemented by common political and economic interests. But Islamabad's close relationship with Tehran is not a mutually exclusive one. "We have with Iran deep cultural links of literature, history and religion. Many people in Pakistan speak the Persian language, Farsi. Our bilateral relations are problem free," Serdar Ali stressed.

"Pakistan and Iran have a constitution based on Islam, but not so the newly independent former Soviet Central Asian republics. They are not Islamic states even though they are predominantly Muslim countries. Nevertheless, we share a common history and common roots. The desire for closer links is strong after 70 years of Soviet rule," he noted.

And India? Here we approach the nub of the problem. "Very high defence expenditure is the main impediment to economic growth and development in South Asia. India alone is responsible. They fought 18 wars in South Asia against different countries in the last 48 years. They triggered off arms races in the region. We feel threatened and we are obliged to defend ourselves. Their people are suffering and our people are suffering. After exorbitant defence expenditures there is very little left for the common man. Unless India corrects this then I see no hope for our region. We — a small country in relation to India — cannot be expected to sign unilaterally the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty. India's nuclear capability is 20 times more than ours. It has tested a nuclear bomb and has committed aggression three times against us" he said.

"Lack of population planning is another problem. Exceptionally high population growth rates mean more mouths to feed and inhibit economic development. Pakistan's rate of 3.1 per cent is one of the highest in the world.," he said.

During his two-day visit, the Pakistani foreign minister met Arab League Secretary-General Esmat Abdel-Meguid and chaired the Egyptian-Pakistani Joint Cooperation Committee with his Egyptian counterpart, Foreign Minister Amr Moussa. Four treaties were signed between the two states: on maritime transport, tourism and cultural cooperation, and an agreement to avoid double taxation of the two countries' expatriate citizens. It was almost business as usual between Egypt and Pakistan despite the Islamabad embassy bombing.



National Democratic Coalition supporters in Lagos demonstrating against military rule in Nigeria (photo: AP)

Nigeria 'surprised' by world condemnation

Despite strong condemnation the world over for its execution of nine political activists last month, Nigeria insists that the event was "minor" and should not "disturb Afrian unity", reports **Nevine Khalil**

In the aftermath of the hanging of nine political and environmental activists last month, Nigeria found itself shunned by the world community, but is now trying to mend the many severed relations. Nigeria's military government of General Sani Abacha was widely rebuked for its "heinous act", in the words of South African President Nelson Mandela, and its membership in the British Commonwealth was suspended. Additionally, Nigeria was subjected to arms embargoes by the European Union and the United States, which have also stopped visits to their countries by Nigerian officials.

After a meeting with President Mubarak on Sunday, Nigeria's Foreign Minister Tom Ikimi told reporters that his government's actions were "distorted by the international community", and that the objective of the visit was to clarify his country's position. "I think the matter was understood by President Mubarak," said Ikimi, who handed Mubarak a letter from Nigeria's President Abacha.

"This [issue] should be put in the right perspective," Ikimi said, referring to the hanging of nine political activists. "[Saro-]Wiwa and the others were not executed because of their human rights or environmental struggle, [but for] the murder of four other Nigerians."

Ken Saro-Wiwa, 54, one of Nigeria's most prominent authors, environmentalists and political activists, along with eight other members of the Oguni ethnic group, were hanged in Port Harcourt, in southeastern Nigeria, last month for the murders of four pro-government Oguni chiefs.

President Mandela has been one of the most vocal critics of the Nigerian regime since the hangings, heading a campaign for tougher sanctions against the country. In response, Ikimi said that Mandela's campaign was based on "a lack of information and understanding of what has happened in Nigeria". He added that Nigeria did not retaliate against its critics because it had "always maintained peace and harmony" with countries in and outside Africa. He hoped that the anti-Nigeria campaign would subside as more African and non-African leaders come to understand the situation in Nigeria.

As Ikimi left Cairo for Addis Ababa to attend a conflict-resolution meeting of the Organisation of African Unity, he said that Nigeria had received "favourable responses from African leaders" on its participation in African affairs.

A UN General Assembly committee last Thursday overwhelmingly condemned Nigeria's "arbitrary execution, after a flawed judicial process," of Saro-Wiwa and eight other activists. The military tribunal which condemned the nine was widely discredited by world leaders and human rights groups. It is even reported that prosecution witnesses admitted they were bribed to testify.

Ikimi denied that Saro-Wiwa and his colleagues received an unfair trial in a military tribunal. "It was a proper court according to the Nigerian constitution," Ikimi said. "They were tried in a public constitutional court."

Ikimi was "surprised" that the world was concerned about Sara-Wiwa being tried for murder, and not about the four people whom he murdered". Ikimi argued that human rights concerns should not only be voiced over "those who commit crimes, but should extend to those whom the crime is perpetrated against".

Saro-Wiwa was not guilty of carrying out the murders himself, but Ikimi said that he who instigates, provides the weapons and plots the killings is also a murderer.

The Oguni movement, which sometimes participated in violence and civil disobedience, was founded five years ago by Saro-Wiwa, who asserted that his people were victims of oil drilling on their land by subsidiaries of Royal Dutch-Shell. He wanted the Oguni to have a share in the billions of dollars of oil revenues. Oil accounts for about 80 per cent of Nigeria's exports.

Saro-Wiwa was also campaigning to stop the government and the oil industry from exploiting the land and waters of his homeland, Oguniland, in southeastern Nigeria.

In 1993, the movement persuaded Shell to stop drilling in their land and, before the hangings, the company vowed to cease development in Oguniland unless the inhabitants received some economic benefits.

In October, the same month in which he was sentenced, Saro-Wiwa was nominated for the 1996 Nobel Peace Prize. He told the court just before being sentenced to death: "My ideas will live."

Settlement or settling scores?

Clashes erupted between Philippine government forces and militant Muslim groups opposing an agreement signed in Indonesia this week between the Filipino government and Muslim separatist rebels. **Sayed Awad** surveys the obstacles to peace

Philippine government officials met with representatives of the Moro National Liberation Front (MNLF) in the Indonesian capital Jakarta this week to end the war in the southern Philippines. The MNLF has been waging a bloody civil war for the creation of a separate Muslim state in the south of the country.

Meanwhile, fighting broke out in the southern Philippines between the MNLF and the breakaway Moro Islamic Liberation Front (MILF) headed by Salmat Hashim. Security forces in the Philippines went on full alert in the southern part of the country, peopled essentially by Muslims, following threats of terrorist attacks. The MILF is far more militant than the MNLF and has rejected the latter's peace accord with the Philippine authorities.

According to the Jakarta agreement, the Philippine government will grant the Filipino Muslims self-rule. However, the accord emphasised the unity and territorial integrity of the country.

The Philippine Muslims are yearning for a self-governing state of their own, but they are divided as to how they should go about it. Muslims in the Philippines number just under six million out of a total population of 65 million. The Philippines is a predominantly Christian country — 85 per cent of the population is Roman Catholic — that has often found itself at odds with its largely Muslim neighbours in South East Asia, namely Brunei, Malaysia and Indonesia. The various Philippine governments — both past and present — have traditionally accused the Filipino Muslim separatist groups of being supported by various Muslim states both within the region and beyond.

In the 1970s, the Organisation of the Islamic Conference (OIC) intervened to stop the bloodshed. The Tripoli agreement between the MNLF and the Philippine government of the late President Ferdinand Marcos was reached soon after the OIC initiative in 1976. However, the administration of President Corazon Aquino refused to accept the terms stipulated in the Tripoli agreement. The Aquino administration attempted instead to woo the more moderate members of the MNLF leadership.

The predominantly Muslim provinces in the southern Philippines are rich in natural and largely untapped resources. There are vast reserves of timber, petroleum and other minerals, as well as fisheries. The grain and beef produce of these provinces is substantial and the southern Philippines is known as the "bread basket" of the country. Between 65 to 70 per cent of the Philippines' revenues and exports originate in the southern region.

It is in this context that extremist Muslim groups emerged in the southern Philippines to fight for total independence. The most militant of these groups is the Abu Sayyaf Group which is widely believed to have close links with Ramzi Ahmed Youssef, the alleged mastermind of the New York World Trade Centre bombing in 1993.

Although the mainstream insurgent faction, the MNLF, signed the ceasefire with the government of President Fidel Ramos in Jakarta this week, the Abu Sayyaf Group is not covered by the agreement. It has vowed to continue the struggle against the Philippine government. Youssef was believed to be in the Philippines earlier this year, allegedly in order to assassinate the then visiting Pope John Paul II.

But the Filipino Muslims' struggle for either self-rule or total independence has spread from the south to the rest of the country. This week, 17 Filipino Muslims, including one policeman, were arrested in a Muslim quarter of the capital Manila in the north of the country and charged with instigating terrorist activities. The 17 suspected terrorists were believed to be members of the Abu Sayyaf Group. According to the Philippine authorities, the suspects had stashed away arms caches — including pistols, assault rifles and shotguns, as well as ammunition and bullet-proof vests. The police also seized illegal drugs, mainly marijuana.

Edited by **Gamal Nkrumah**



What is to be done?

In elections on Sunday, Russians expressed their disillusionment with the chaos that has followed the fall of communism, writes **Faiza Rady**

In December 1991, Russian President Boris Yeltsin, his Ukrainian counterpart Leonid Kravchuk and Premier Stanilav Shushkevich of Belarus signed the historic Belovezhskaya agreement. The document dissolved the USSR and invalidated socialism and Soviet law, along with the *institutions of* the Soviet state. Now, four years later, election results show that at least 23 per cent of Russian voters favour the return to a communist *form of* government. "We didn't realise how good it was before," said Grigory Petrov, a Foreign Ministry employee. Like millions disillusioned by the "market" reforms, Petrov voted communist. Among the 43 parties and 8,000 candidates competing for the 450 seats in the Duma — the lower house of parliament — the Communist Party was the strongest in the 17 December elections, it is expected to secure at least one third of the seats.

Party leader Gennady Zyuganov's current programme includes a universal referendum on Beloveszhskaya's legitimacy and the resolve to re-nationalise Russia's major industries. Hailing election results, Zyuganov commented: "Look at how many people have confidence in the government: one out of 10. What kind of government can continue working in such conditions?"

Over the past years, Zyuganov has managed to build a sizeable alliance of the left, with 112 delegates in the Duma. The Communists' potential power was effectively demonstrated on Friday 8 December when the party, in coalition with the left-leaning bloc — the Agrarian Party of Russia and the Congress of Russian Societies — fell only 17 votes short of the simple majority needed in the Duma to declare Belovezhskaya null and void. The scrapping of the accord, *however, would need a* two-thirds majority vote to overrule the presidential veto.

The Communists' upsurge in popularity was determined by Russia's at best haphazard, at worst aberrant path to the so-called free market. Neither socialist nor capitalist, the country's hybrid economy defies conventional theoretical denomination. Unable otherwise to define a system that has become chaotic, specialists now vaguely refer to "bureaucratic or political capitalism", "state corporatism" and "clientism". As a result of such chaos, Russia has experienced an economic crisis, which economist Hans Joerg Rudloff described as more-severe than America's Great Depression in the 1930s.

Since privatisation started in the late '80s, about 90,000 companies were sold — mostly at a loss. A symptomatic case: in 1990, a Moscow fan factory with an annual output of 17 million rubles was sold to management for only 6.5 million. Pressed to sell, the government similarly sold about three-quarters of the public sector to its managers, who paid by borrowing from their company budgets. Moreover, many of the new owners relied on their long established political networks to receive government subsidies. Consequently, nascent private businesses continued to function like a public sector — with the owners capitalising on state funds, while pocketing the profits. In the spring of '93, the cost of such direct and indirect subsidies amounted to 22 per cent of the Gross National Product.

As has been witnessed in other former communist countries, the economic contradictions are inscribed in the street scene. Gorki Street, formerly a favourite youth hangout, today only caters to the emerging affluent elite — "the new Russians". At a corner bar, a beer and a sandwich cost 20,500 rubles or five dollars, the equivalent of the monthly minimum wage. A restaurant meal is $50 and an average night-club dinner $300; annual club memberships range between $10,000 and $50,000. The chic cliques that patronise such clubs exhibit all the conventional trappings of conspicuous consumption, including heavily armed security guards.

On the other side of the Moscow tracks live the other Russians, like those who have subsisted on the $5 minimum wage and faced the 200 per cent annual inflation rate in '95. *Their monthly buying power* allows them the choice between a 20kg ration of bread, one kilogramme of sausage or 400 grammes of cheese. Moreover, minimum wagers fare well in comparison with a majority of the unemployed who receive no benefits at all; of the estimated 7.1 per cent unemployed only 1.9 per cent are registered and entitled to compensation, while the remainder are cast aside. As for senior citizens, they are paid a $15 monthly pension, enough to buy 10 modest hot meals. The old generally survive on bread, tea and a few tins of food. "We now visit stores like we visit museums," runs a popular one-liner. Workers who take home $33 a month — an estimated one-third to one-half of the workforce — are equally unable to purchase the vital necessities. Such hardship has already affected lifespans. Since the fall of communism four years ago, male life expectancy has dropped from 63 to 59 years.

Experts consider that a $625 per capita monthly budget is needed to buy basic nutrition and health needs in Moscow. "How can we even pretend to speak of happiness when thousands tell us they are destitute, their fridges are empty and they often can't face getting up in the morning?" commented *Radio Russia* in January 1995. Teachers, researchers and scientists are also unable to make ends meet. Adding fuel to the fire, the government has failed to pay their employees in more than three months. Despair has driven many to leave a country that blocks their future.

In an attempt to alleviate the people's extreme suffering this winter, the Duma voted to increase pension funds as well as the minimum wage. The vote, however, fell short of the required two-thirds majority and President Boris Yeltsin vetoed the resolution. *Last March, the In*ternational Monetary Fund (IMF) awarded the government a $6.4 billion loan and the proposed pay increases would have contravened IMF-imposed austerity measures. Accordingly, investment in social programmes fell from 35 per cent of the budget in 1990 to the current 14 per cent. Russian annual per capita health and education expenditures now compare with those of impoverished sub-Saharan Africa: annually $5 per child is spent on education, while the cost of a can of beer is allotted to per capita health care. This bizarre scenario is appearing more and more frequently on the heels of privatisation in a country that, until recently, offered its people high-quality education and one of the most sophisticated health-care systems in the world.

As elsewhere, social inequalities and hopelessness have contributed to a rising crime rate. "We might note," comments prominent linguist and political analyst Noam Chomsky, "that inequality has an antiseptic sound, more soothing than what it means: starving children, broken families, criminal violence, and all the social pathology that arises from the end of hope." In 1994, more than 32,000 people were murdered in Russia — about twice the rate when the Soviet Union broke up, more than twice the current US rate and 22 times Japan's.

Criminal assaults and homicide are often directly linked to privatisation. Organised street gangs now murder the old, the mentally handicapped and the drunks after extorting release forms to their apartment deeds — the rent for centrally located 50-square-metre apartments ranges between $1,500 and $3,000. Since '92, when some rents were privatised, 10,000 apartment tenants and owners have mysteriously disappeared. Moreover, businessmen routinely resolve disputed deals by hiring hit-men. Beside such "rationally" motivated crimes, gratuitous acts of violence abound. Sociologists speak of the people's regression to "savagery". The director of a Tufts University study correlating poverty with crime, explained the pathology patterns: "They learn hopelessness very quickly *knowing that they* cannot affect their environment. In a hopeless situation, people do things they would not otherwise consider."

The government, assisted by the media, has pointed the finger at the "foreign culprits" in an attempt to deflect its responsibility and blur the real issues. In October '93, the authorities deported illegal Caucasian residents en masse, while propagandising news of alleged "Chechnyan terrorism". Despite such strategic diversions, the government, fearing a popular uprising, has attempted to cover its back by moving *about 1,000* riot control police to Stroguino, a suburb close to central Moscow.

Although the Russian people have not yet rioted, they clearly expressed their opposition to the untenable conditions at the polls. Yet, the ruling class of the new Russian capitalists, backed by the North and multinational power, will certainly block Communist attempts to transform the economy. According to the *Economist*, party politics and the democratic election process have now become irrelevant in Russia. Regardless of who wins the parliamentarian or even the presidential elections, "big decisions are taken...by the *market*". Gennady Zyuganov's capacity to effect tangible change, beyond mere cosmetic reforms, remains highly questionable.

Communist comeback

Despite their victory at the polls, the Communists are unlikely to change things drastically, writes **Abdel-Malik Khalil** from Moscow

After reviewing the preliminary returns from Russia's 89 regions following last Sunday's election, the Russian central election commission announced that the Communist Party had a significant lead over the other 42 parties.

The committee further disclosed that at least three other parties were on course to being represented in the Duma — Russia's lower house of parliament. The new Russian constitution, which took effect in 1993, requires that political parties must receive a minimum of five per cent of the total vote to obtain a seat in the Duma.

The Communists were at the top of the list with 23 per cent of the votes cast, while the Liberal Democratic Party, led by ultra-nationalist Vladimir Zhirinovsky, was second with 11.2 per cent.

Third place in the 17 December parliamentary elections was held by Prime Minister Viktor Chernomyrdin's Our Home is Russia, supported by 9.6 per cent of the voters. The Yabloko bloc, headed by the economist Grigori Yavlinsky, ranked fourth with 8.5 per cent.

Turnout on polling day was estimated at 65 per cent, out of a total of 105 million people who are eligible to vote inside and outside Russia. This figure is up from the last Russian parliamentary ballot in 1993, thanks, it seems, to the presence of 900 international observers from 50 different countries who monitored the electoral process.

People have apparently ignored the warnings made by President Boris Yeltsin and his aides about the Communists and ultra-nationalists. Those advanced in years and the homeless, those on meagre pensions and former members of the Soviet Communist Party and the ruling politburo, in particular, have suffered from the last four years of upheaval in Russia. The government has used shock *tactics to implement, hurriedly, economic lib*eralisation.

Residents of remote parts of Russia — in the country's vast centre and near its borders — tended more towards the Communists and nationalist parties, whereas voters in Moscow and St Petersburg generally found the programmes of democratic reform parties, such as Our Home Is Russia, Russia's Democratic Choice and Yabloko, more appealing.

The younger generations, who grew up as the Soviet system was collapsing, were also more likely to vote for continued reform.

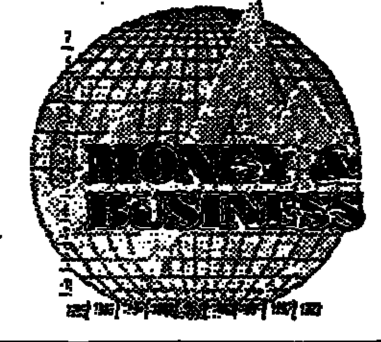
Yeltsin's verbal attacks against the Communists showed that the ailing Russian leader had failed in his duty to maintain a publically neutral stance towards the electoral contest. They were also unconvincing. Instead of picking at flaws in the policies and aims of Gennady Zyuganov's Communist Party, Yeltsin merely denied that a true opposition existed in Russia.

Zyuganov, on the other hand, has advocated a mixed economy and his party's programme includes neither wide-scale re-nationalisation of privatised industries nor a return to the old Soviet centrally planned economy.

Voters have realised that the Communists do not want to rule Russia on their own but prefer a government coalition, possibly by forming an alliance with Zhirinovsky's Liberal Democrats and other parties. The Communist Party would probably not want to bear full responsibility if it failed to rescue the Russian Federation from its present crisis.

However much Russia's parliament is reshuffled now, the real contest between reform and rejection will come in June 1996 when Russians are due to elect a new president.





Mohandes Insurance to increase capital

SAMIR Mustafa Metwalli, chairman of the board of Mohandes Insurance Co, explained that because the demand of some of its major shareholders, the company's general assembly meeting will include in its agenda a proposal to increase the issued capital of the company by LE2mn. Metwalli said that the proposed increase will raise the company's capital from its current level of LE20mn to LE22mn. A free share will be given for every ten a shareholder owns. This is in addition to raising the profit margin distributed for the fiscal year 1994-95 to 30 per cent of the share's nominal value.

Seminar on tax evasion in Egypt

THE EGYPTIAN Assembly of General Finance and Taxes will hold a seminar on tax evasion this Sunday. Rizq Ahmed Rizq, a member of the assembly's board, explained that the seminar will discuss tax evasion, its effect on Egyptian society, the effect of tax evasion on the national product and the extent done within direct and indirect taxation. The seminar will also propose suggestions to help prevent tax evasion which will involve, among other things, placing restrictions on activities that are more prone to tax evasion.

On computers and their use

DR TAHIR El-Sheikh, a computer and data processing professor, says that computers are becoming much more commonplace among all professions, and are entering all areas of daily life to make our lives easier. The first question, however, that someone asks when studying computers for *the first time, is "what does a computer do, and* what benefit will I receive from it?" A short answer to this question is that computers process data, but then what is "word processing"? What, exactly, is meant by "processing"?

Processing is a general description which means to perform some operations on raw materials and transform them into materials suitable for use. Different industries process raw materials which undergo treatment to transform them into ready-to-use products. An example of this is the clothes industry, which uses fabric as its raw material and undergoes various procedures to eventually result *in ready-made clothing. Likewise, computers* use information, known as data, as the raw material which must be processed to transform it into information suitable for practical use afterwards. The output data from the computer is the result that the computer gives after gathering facts and numbers and processing them into instructions which are stored in the computer's memory. These instructions make up the programme which produces results suitable for making decisions at appropriate times.

Data processing by use of computers has numerous benefits which cannot be ignored. First, they allow for speed, precision and accuracy by using electronic circuits. Second, is that the need for the human factor decreases to a great extent *because programmes are stored in the computer's* memory. Third, is the ease by which data can be stored in files and called up at any time. This is in addition to numerous benefits which cannot be listed here.

You also have a wide selection programmes to choose from, depending on your needs and your specialisation, as can be seen from the following categories:

— Word processing: You can use this type of programnme to write reports, research papers and letters of all kinds, and incorporate photographs and illustrations within the document itself. Numerous word *processing programmes are available* on the market, among them Microsoft Word, Word-Perfect and Word Star.

— Spreadsheet programmes: Accountants and businessmen take great interest in these programmes, for spreadsheet programmes are precise and fast in juggling and analysing numbers to be used for making forecasts, budget reports, as well as charts which can present data in a simple and clear format. There are a number of good spreadsheet programmes available, among them Lotus 1-2-3, Excel and Quattro Pro.

— Database programmes: These programmes use files to store data which can be retrieved *quickly, in addition to the ease of search for any* record having specific parameters within the data. There are a number of database programmes.

— Graphics programmes: These programmes transform numbers into graphics, clearly and simply, which allows for numerous possibilities of use. Many graphics programmes are available on the market, the most well-known being Harvard Graphics.

— High-level languages: Studying these languages must be considered by the programmer who wishes to create programmes such as the ones listed above. It is therefore necessary that *the programmer be proficient in at least one or two* of these high-level languages. The principles of learning these languages are the same, but implementing them are different in every case.

Faisal Islamic Bank covering all fields

SINCE its foundation in 1979, the Faisal Islamic Bank of Egypt has established and is a shareholder in 37 companies and financial organisations, 3 of which are currently under construction. *Of these com*panies' total capital of LE1073mn, the bank has provided them with LE198*mn. The companies* operate in a variety of activities, among them industrial, agricultural, pharmaceutical, medical, animal products, tourism, housing, construction and trade.

The diversity of these activities reflects the policy of the bank and its desire to take an active role in development projects on one hand, and to hold a wide range of investments on the other. As such, these investments have *been spread through*out residential cities and new industrial zones, and operate in accordance to international standards in their fields.

These companies provide goods and services of the highest quality, operating according to international standards. These goods and services are offered competitive prices both to Egyptian consumers as well as for export. Located in both the new industrial zones and new residential areas, the companies have the additional benefit of providing jobs for *thousands of individuals.* As a result of its share in financing these companies, the bank has been able to *realise profits.*

The bank has provided some LE12bn in financing to its customers covering all areas, from agriculture to industry. The bank also takes part in establishing numerous projects in Egypt.

Al-Ahram Weekly

Proof in the Christmas pudding

In a magnanimous gesture of pre-Yuletide spirit, and after decades of ignoring UN Security Council resolutions condemning Israel for its actions, Prime Minister Shimon Peres announced that "Israel is ready to pay the full price for peace" with Syria, and December 27 has been set as the date for the first round of flexible, open, no holds barred dialogue between Israel and Syria.

Pundits, pontificating and opining on the meaning of Peres's quotable quotes, have decided that Peres is unselfishly willing to risk his chance of re-election by agreeing to a full withdrawal and, should the first round of talks go well, to declare the Golan as sovereign Syrian territory. No mention, however, has yet been made on how much land will be returned as part of the price for peace.

To some this may seem like a giant leap for peace, but has Peres accurately gauged the width of the chasm he wishes to hurdle? An Israeli public opinion survey reveals that 55 per cent of Israelis are steadfastly against a land-for-peace agreement. Moreover, dozens of leading rabbis have decreed it legal for Jews to take up arms against any plan to withdraw from the Golan. Clearly, the issue is not whether Assad is serious about peace, as the US has queried, but if Peres can translate his assurances into action.

Peres has stated that he intends to expand the scope of the negotiations to include a multitude of issues such as water rights and economic cooperation. This may be more than the late Prime Minster Rabin had been willing to tackle at the negotiating table, but it still falls short of the assurances demanded by Syria that Israel withdraws to pre-1967 borders.

Regardless of how skillfully the real issues are skirted, sifting through the pledges, promises and proclamations, the rhetoric and the assurances, the only tangible result of Christopher's trip to the Middle East has so far been that both sides have agreed to agree. Perhaps the meeting in the US will result in an agreement to act.

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Strategic options for the future

Mohamed Sid-Ahmed discusses strategic concepts he expects will acquire increasing relevance on the threshold of the new century and, in a second article below, replies to a critique by Gamil Mattar

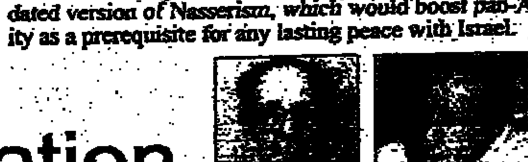
In his opening address to the Peoples Assembly last Saturday, President Mubarak set fourteen strategic targets for the coming stage. In striving to achieve those targets, however, we must not lose sight of the fact that the few years separating us from the next century are likely to witness the emergence of a wholly new relationship between Israel and the Arab world.

Israel is trying to use the resumption of its negotiations with Syria as a springboard for the full normalisation of relations with the Arab world at large. Peres is proposing that any agreement signed with Syria be co-signed by some eighteen Arab stages, a proposal which, if adopted, will move the entire region from a state of hostility to one of full-fledged peace with Israel, and isolate the Middle East states still spurning the peace process, namely, Iraq, Iran and Libya. Ironically, it is now Israel, not the Arabs, which is calling for the replacement of bilateral arrangements by an overall peace.

Already the groundwork is being laid to enable Israel to become what many predict will be the Silicon Valley of the Middle East. Last October, the leading manufacturer of micro-processors in the world, Intel Corp., signed a $1.5 billion contract for the construction of a plant for semi-conductors in southern Israel, while another giant American corporation specialised in mobile *phones, Motorola, is currently negotiating a $1 billion contract* for a similar plant. In the sixties, agricultural production accounted for 70 per cent of Israel's GNP; today, with Israel's high-tech orientation, it is down to 3 per cent. This trend is reversed when it comes to Israel's exports of electronic products, which are expected to rise from $5.5 billion last year to $7 billion this year.

Initially, Israel developed its electronics industry for military purposes, particularly in the field of missile warfare, but as the threat of war recedes, its pioneering work in this area is giving it an economic-technological edge, certainly over its neighbours, and perhaps even at the global level beyond the markets of the Middle East. If, as seems to be the case, Israel is aspiring to an economic role of global import, its peace effort would be aimed more at disencumbering itself of the burden of regional security concerns than at fulfilling objectives of peace acceptable to the Arabs. Such an Israeli project is bound to arouse Egypt's apprehensions and confront it with a hard choice: on the one hand, if it adopts a policy of unrestrained liberalism, this would deprive it of any immunity against Israel's perception of a Middle East market; on the other, if it espouses an ideology of Islamic fundamentalism rooted in the past, this will not help it cope with the challenges of a future-looking Israel busily developing state-of-the-art technologies. One way out could be the adoption of an updated version of Nasserism, *which would boost pan-Arab solidarity* as a prerequisite for any lasting peace with Israel.

Order, chaos and global polarisation





Sid-Ahmed Mattar

In an article carried by *Al-Ahram Weekly* two weeks ago, my good friend Gamil Mattar expressed reservations about an article I published, also in the *Weekly*, a week earlier under the title, "A new form of bipolarity". According to Mattar, I posited that we were entering a bipolar system in which one pole, comprising world states, international organisations and multinational corporations, could be attributed to an orderly system, the so-called new world order, while the other pole, made up of terrorism, fundamentalist extremism, organised crime and trade in prohibited goods such as drugs, radioactive materials and weapons, represents chaos and disorder.

His main critique was that it is risky to categorise religious-cum-fundamentalist, national, sectarian and ethnic revivals as components of disorder, and condemns the notion that fundamentalism is an anarchical phenomenon. In fact, my article *did not cite fundamentalism* as one of the components of the pole of disorder, which were identified as "international terrorism, transnational criminal networks, international drug dealers, the new trade in radioactive materials destined for the manufacture of nuclear weapons, and deals involving conventional arms, in which many states, including great powers, are implicated."

Having said that, however, I believe the real misunderstanding arose not over whether fundamentalism *is part of the pole of disorder, but* over the definition of a pole. Traditionally, a pole was perceived as a superpower or a bloc of states. While this was true under a world order dominated by two distinct poles, today the notion of pole can be expanded to include every form of acute polarisation, even between protagonists which are not states. Under a new world order where inter-state wars can escalate into global conflagrations, constraints are placed on given forms of struggle (nuclear warfare, for instance), and therefore on given forms of polarisation, thus dissociating polarisation as a phenomenon from state polarisation. The international intervention to put an end to the civ*il war in Bosnia serves as a graphic illustration* that certain forms of war cannot be tolerated.

The traditional forms of polarisation come up against the transformation of our planet into a global village characterised by growing interpenetration and interdependence between states. Acute polarisation no longer manifests itself in terms of the lines of demarcation between states, and the new world order carries within it disaffected and rebellious elements which have come to constitute a distinct, opposite pole.

Mattar says that the existence of rebellious or illegal factions advocating change does not necessarily diminish the value of an international order, pointing out that in the world order that prevailed between the two world wars, communism and Nazism were able to take root in the very heart of western capitalism. All three existed within a single, multi-polar international order and all aimed to destroy that order and create a unilateral order dominated by one ideology. In other words, a single order contained contradictory trajectories. So too in the bipolar world order which emerged in the aftermath of World War II, where the objectives of transnational movements such as national liberation *movements and non-alignment, conflicted with* those of the dominant world system, and were perceived in western capitals as elements of chaos and disorder operating outside the accepted norms of international behaviour.

The essential idea in my article was not whether world order is unilateral, bilateral or multilateral, but, rather, revolved around the idea of polarisation. The term pole entered the political vocabulary only after World War II, and my main concern was to stress that bi*polarity did not disappear with the disappearance* of one of its two poles. Bipolarity still exists in a new world system, where its most obvious expression is not between states, but, rather, between two apparently contradictory phenomena: an emerging globalism, which is antithetical, by definition, to bipolarity; and, at the same time, the intensification of conflicts at grass-root level that are not contained within well-defined geographical boundaries nor decided by the sovereign will of states. Moreover, the components of the pole of disorder are not located exclusively in the South; some, like the arms and drug trades would not exist without the collu*sion of parties in the North. As to terrorism,* one of the most anarchical manifestations of what I call the new bipolarity, Israel, whose prime minister was recently assassinated by home-grown terrorists, can hardly be attributed to the South.

An intemperate dichotomy

1995 has been a year of fierce confrontation between Islamists and secularists. Starting next week, the *Soapbox* column, on the opposite page, will play host to a number of distinguished writers from both sides of the divide. Below, **Rifaat El-Said** reviews the history of the confrontation, from a secularist perspective

Secularism constitutes a rational approach to coming to terms with and conceptualising the world around us. It frees the intellect to explore the diverse elements that condition human existence. But for us this notion has come to be distorted. It now carries only one connotation, and that is atheism. For some reason secularism has become the very antithesis of faith.

*Islamism is an expression of the at*tempt to appropriate religion, placing it exclusively in the hands of those who would traffic with it in the political marketplace, intentionally distorting Islam towards their own aims and perceptions.

The adjective "Islamist" carries absolutist connotations. It is a form of categorisation that implies, simultaneously, an affiliation of faith and its converse. As the word Egyptian implies a collection of commonly shared cultural traits distinct from other nationalities, the term "Islamist" has all too readily come to mean Muslim as opposed to heretic.

The conflict between Egyptian secularism and Egyptian Islamism dates back to the secularist notions put forward by Refa'a El-Tahtawi. Both an Al-Azhar scholar and a secular intellectual, El-Tahtawi lent Egyptian secularism an Islamic tincture, and most Egyptian secularists have been and still are of the Tahtawi school. The conflict erupted over that eternal question: whether the world is round or flat. El-Tahtawi escaped the Islamists' trap by suggesting that *though most religious scholars* believed the earth to be flat, there were a few, such as a Sheikh Mohamed Al-Manai from Timbuktu in Azaouad, who believed *it* to be round. With this diplomatic reply, Tahtawi set what might be termed the 'impartial method' of engaging in debate with the Islamists.

Soon after El-Tahtawi, a secularist firebrand, Shebli Schmeil, a Lebanese Maronite, flung down the gauntlet of challenge with his translation of Buchner's interpretation of Darwinian theory (1870). The Islamists engaged in battle over a subject about which they knew nothing. Schmeil, a stubborn adversary, was not frightened by the prospect of accusations, even of atheism, and announced that his relationship with God was a private matter in which others had no right to interfere.

Perhaps the vehemence of the controversy kindled by Schmeil is what *convinced contemporary Egyptian in*tellectuals that the more reserved approach of El-Tahtawi was the safest way to deal with the Islamists and the most appropriate way to deal with the public.

Other encounters flared up and receded. One of the more illustrious was the disputation between the Imam, Mohamed Abdou, and the leftist intellectual Farah Anton (owner of the magazine, *Al-Gami'a*). The scholarly and national tenor of their debate did justice to both sides. However, it had frightening repercussions among the public. Such was the zealotry of the Muslims' support for their Imam and the Christians' support for their intellectual co-religionist that tensions were on the verge of erupting into riots. To quell the tensions, Mohamed Abdou and Farah Anton had to agree to close the door to their reasoned debate.

Other prominent intellectuals engaged in equally elevated and stimulating battles of the mind. These fathers of Egyptian liberalism — by which I wish to imply a tolerance and respect for the opinion of others — *included Mohamed Farid Wagdi, Ab*bas El-Aqqad, Ali Adham. The high point of the age of liberalism coincided with the movement that gave rise to the 1919 revolution. However, the reversal against democracy, beginning with the government of Ziwar Pasha, paved the way for the return of *Islamist* zealotry, and deprived liberal dialogue of its potential. Vicious and irrational campaigns were waged against individual writers and their works. Taha Hussein and Sheikh Mustafa Abdel-Razeq were both victims of this development.

One could say that the contest between secularism and Islamism has never abated. Rather, it fluctuates between a dynamic tolerance in times of liberal fluorescence and mindless bigotry with the rise of anti-liberalism. We are now in an era of heated intolerance, when the general climate is poisoned with an Islamism *that paints the other as black.* Religion has come to be associated with the mistaken notion that one's proximity to God is proportional to one's repudiation of the other (here taken to mean those who hold opinion's contrary to one's own and who are therefore heretics, or those who are adherents to other religions and are at best referred to as *zimmis* — non-Muslims).

The aim of our battle against Islamism *is* to liberate Islam from its clutches and to free the Egyptian intellect from constraints imposed in the name of religion. We should remember that Islam has no priesthood, or any single body entitled to think for others. The door to conjecture in religious exegesis is open to all who are capable. We reject the confusion between religion, as a divine quantity, and religious thinking, which is a human endeavour. We further repudiate the politicisation of religion and the religiosity of politics. Religion is born by faith, whereas politics is the realm of human rivalries in the pursuit of temporal interests.

The current battle between Egyp*tian secularists and Islamists* revolves around a collection of values and ideals, which include both the right to free thinking and the right of the public to legislate for themselves (This right is refuted by all Islamists without exception. For them, any new laws that might be required *should* be *legislated* by "those in power" not by duly elected representatives of the people. They reject the notion of majority rule, on the basis that the majority might legislate in a manner that would violate the precepts of Islam.)

The battle also includes the public's right to the rotation of power. Islamists only accept one rotation, that which brings them to power. Once they get there, they announce, as they did in Iran and Sudan, that Islam, not a group of individuals, is the government, and, therefore, any attempt to overturn the government would be considered an act against Islam.

*Multi-party democracy is implicat*ed in the battle since for the Islamists there are only two parties — the party of God destined to rule, and the party of the devil, that must be removed.

Some Islamists, notably among the Muslim Brotherhood, have announced that they accept democracy and majority rule. However, we should not be deceived. Deception for them is a legitimate tactic for "the Muslim has the right to delude the enemy in order to overpower him and kill him" (see Mahmoud El-Sabbagh, *The Story of the Brotherhood's Underground*. The author is a leader of the organisation, the introduction is by Mustafa Mashhour, currently the organisation's strongman). This principle has evolved from an erroneous interpretation of the position of the Prophet and his companions at the beginning of their call to Islam, when they were obliged to adopt "the policy of the weak" during the Meccan phase, as opposed to the "policy of the strong" during the Medina phase of the Prophet's career.

In short, the conflict between sec*ularists and Islamists is* sharp and intense. It can be summarised in a few words: Some are looking forward in an attempt to extricate the country from its difficulties as it enters the 21st century. These are the secularists. Others are looking 14 centuries backwards in time for a solution. The ensuing gulf requires no further amplification.

The writer is a historian and secretary-general of the left-wing Tagammu Party.

Unequal distribution

By Naguib Mahfouz

Universality in literature implies two concepts, the first qualitative, the second quantitative. The latter implies a high level of acceptance among a diverse readership — something that might apply to, say, detective stories. Agatha Christie, we should remember, is translated into a vast number of languages and her books are available all over the world. She probably outsells all the literary greats put together.

The quantitative concept, then, implies a mass acceptance, the result of an equally massive distribution which has no bearing on literary worth or merit. Qualitative considerations, on the other hand, apply only to those works that afford some degree of intellectual satisfaction, regardless of questions related to their availability. Distribution, in terms of both quantity and geographical cover, is an inappropriate yardstick by which to measure quality.

A *piece of literature* can have a significance that is universal, even if it is restricted in the extent of its distribution. A print run of a few thousand copies may well contain something far more important — indeed, is likely to contain something far more important — than whatever lies between the covers of a volume produced in units measured in multiples of a million or more. Agatha Christie, after all, has outsold Thomas Mann a hundred fold, yet the claims that we make for Mann are hardly applicable to the queen of crime. Quantity can never substitute for quality, nor should the two be confused.

Based on an interview by Mohamed Salmawy.

The Press This Week

By Hassan Fouad

Terrorists in London

THIS WEEK the attention of the national and party press was divided among terrorism, the rulings of the Administrative Court on the elections, and the debate over the Luxor bridge.

On Saturday, **Ibrahim Nafie**, editor-in-chief of **Al-Ahram**, wrote in a front-page article on terrorist operations against Egypt in London: "Britain has no need to look for evidence of the sort of terrorism that is being waged against Egypt. It has only to look at one of the publications put out by terrorist groups in London in order to find out what their aspirations are, not only vis-à-vis Egypt but towards the whole of the civilised world.

"These groups do not conceal their destructive criminal intent. They declare it day and night in their statements, books and advertisements. What is amazing is that the silence of the British authorities has been accompanied by an information campaign in the British press, lead by *The Independent*, which alleges that Egypt has sent hit squads to crack down on terrorist groups in London and Islamabad.

"We are unable to turn a blind eye to the link between terrorism, London and Khartoum and we cannot take expressions of friendship seriously as long as terrorism finds a safe haven in the capitals of 'friendly' nations. Those who seek friendship and wish to protect mutual interests have to clearly define their position vis-a-vis terrorism. And this should be put into effect through deeds and not just words so as to protect nations from the dangers of terrorism."

On the issue of the Luxor bridge which President Mubarak inspected last Thursday, **Sekina Fouad** wrote in **Al-Ahram**: "There is no need to reaffirm that antiquities are affected by the state of the environment around them. This is the philosophy behind the recent Presidential Decree which, if properly understood and applied, would turn Luxor into a model city for antiquities and history."

On Saturday the daily **Al-Wafd**, mouthpiece of the liberal Wafd party, published a front-page editorial which read: "The issue of the Luxor bridge is not the first to reveal differences among members of the government — there is another bridge issue, namely the Abul-Ela bridge, which has been discussed by the President with officials to no avail. What is happening with the bridges reveals poor planning concerning vital issues and a diversity of opinions among different ministries of the same government. We should leave the weightier issues of Egyptian national security, privatisation and the problems of the public sector to the President of the Republic and spare him the squabble over a bridge."

On the importance of protecting antiquities and the environment, **Salama Ahmed Salama** wrote in his daily **Al-Ahram** column on Monday: "We still depend on international aid for protecting natural preserves. This might go on for a few more years after which the onus of looking after these preserves will revert to us and we will not be able to shoulder the responsibility for future generations — herein lies the challenge."

On the election issue **Mustafa Amin** wrote in his back page column in **Akhbar El-Yom**: "The opposition parties will not stop attacking the elections. They will raise the issue on every occasion. They will raise questions and law suits will be filed. This is a golden opportunity for every opposition member to raise his voice. But this is not enough. The papers are not enough.

"The opposition parties should go out on the streets of Egypt and hold rallies in every governorate. They should visit every village and prepare for the next elections as though they were to be held tomorrow. Every party should form a parliamentary body made up of candidates who failed in the elections and call upon them to meet.

"The failure of *most of* the opposition parties' leaderships is a golden opportunity for the parties to unify their ranks. It is the right of every party to have branches in every street and alley with committees for youth and women. We do not direct these words at only the opposition parties but also to the ruling NDP. We ask it not to feel too confident about the results of the elections and strive to make its presence felt in the street and to prepare its members for future conflicts."

In **Al-Mussawar** magazine, editor-in-chief **Makram Mohamed Ahmed** wrote a three-page article entitled "Election wounds" in which he said, "The many wounds in Upper Egypt, Sharqiya, Beheira and north Delta governorates need urgent treatment and require quick political action to deal with the reasons behind the violence. Another wound to be dealt with is the failure of all 50 Coptic candidates in the various constituencies. It is a responsibility incumbent on the NDP, the opposition parties and the government machinery."

In **October** magazine, editor-in-chief **Ragab El-Banna** wrote a *three-page* article entitled "Our future under the dome" in which he said: "There are many battles ahead which require the attention of the new People's Assembly; first, how to drive forward the peace process without allowing Israel to achieve all its objectives and second, the battle to reserve a seat on the train to the 21st century."

Close up

Salama A. Salama

Facts and fiction

The surprise event of the final days of 1995 has been the sudden détente that has descended on the Syrian-Israeli track. In the wake of Warren Christopher's flurry of shuttle diplomacy a Syrian-Israeli agreement has been reached to resume negotiations by the end of this month.

Nobody expected the Syrian-Israeli track to be unblocked so soon, though certainly the assassination of Yitzhak Rabin opened a window of opportunity for the peace process, for both the Israeli and Syrian parties.

This does not imply that Israel has become more flexible vis-à-vis Syrian demands. It does not, after all, matter whether the forces that plotted the assassination of Rabin find resonance in the heart of the Likud opposition, or whether they are restricted to its fringes. What is important is that they remain capable of influencing Peres' negotiating stand and can consequently hinder any progress along the path to peace. Yet it is true that both parties now find themselves free of positions that had earlier mitigated against communication.

Israel no longer insists on negotiations being conducted at the highest level — i.e. between the Israeli prime-minister and the Syrian president — while Syria has stopped insisting that Israel must declare its commitment to a total withdrawal from Syrian territory before talks are possible.

There is as yet no indication as to whether the US Secretary of State Warren Christopher's contacts will ultimately bear fruit. Nor is it as yet apparent whether proposals made by Peres to President Clinton concerning, among other things, issues arising from the presence of early warning stations on Syrian territory, will concretise into any firm commitments.

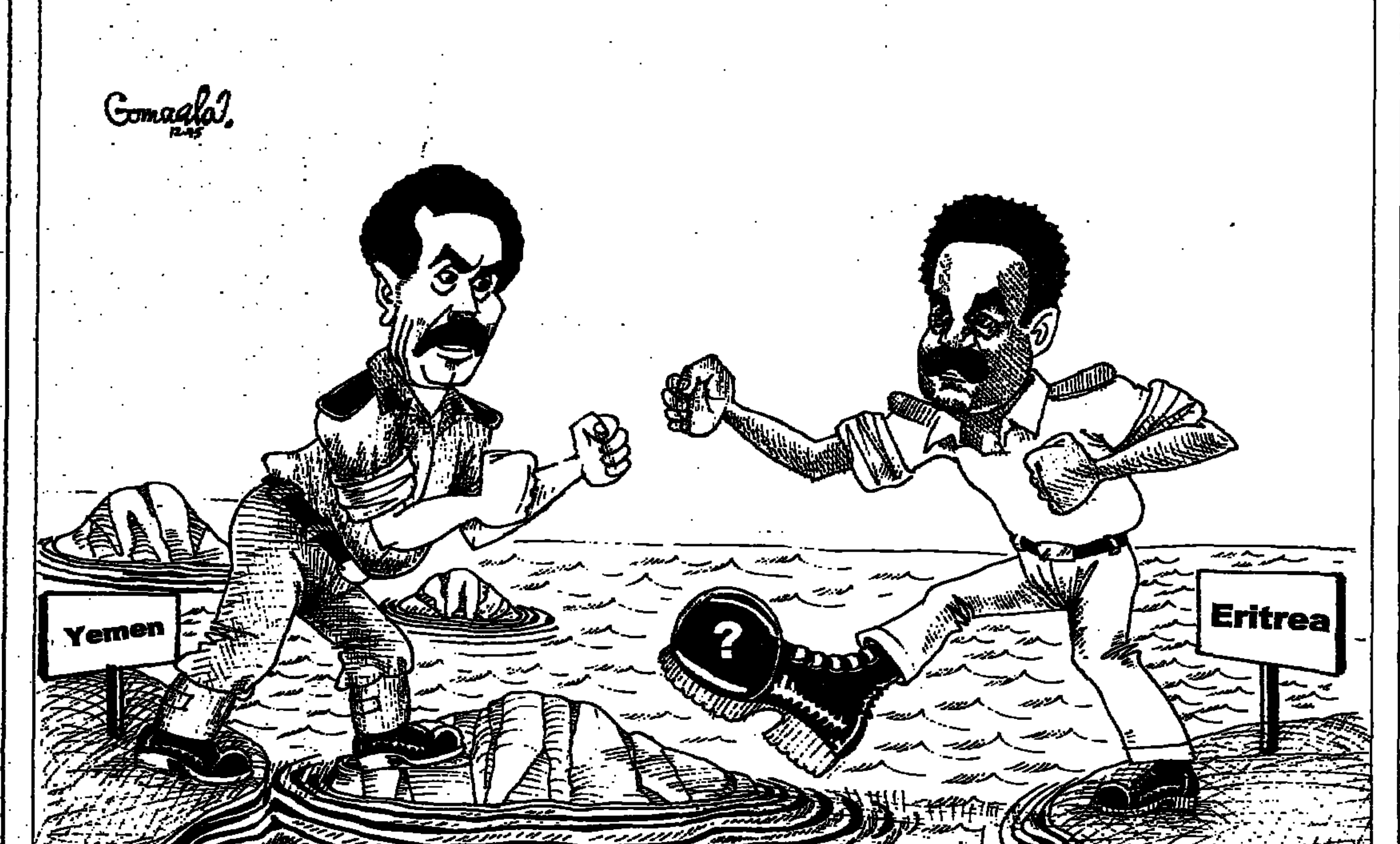
What is certain, though, is that no breakthrough leading to a final agreement can be expected on the Syrian track before the Israeli general elections take place at the end of 1996. So Peres is faced with the prospect of coming up with solutions to the problems posed by Israeli colonists of the Golan acceptable at home. He is also committed to the referendum on the Golan withdrawal promised by Rabin. He must decide on a timetable to settle such matters. Can they be satisfied in a manner acceptable to the Israeli electorate ahead of the election, or should the election itself be brought forward?

In the short term the peace process is likely to be affected most strongly by preparations for the Palestinian elections, due to be held in January 1996. Pre-election discussions between Hamas and the Palestinian National Authority are already underway.

Egypt successfully convinced both sides to hold such discussions in Cairo, not in Sudan. A successful outcome to the talks would be of inestimable value to the PNA in the next stage of negotiations with Israel, since its position would be considerably enhanced if it could argue from the basis of a united Palestinian entity rather than one rent by internal conflicts and strife.

The Syrian position remains firm. There is an insistence on basic principles which will not be subjected to bargaining. All Syrian territory should be liberated, on the basis of land for peace. In contrast the Palestinians, after the concessions made in the Oslo One and Oslo Two agreements, desperately need to close ranks. We must also bear in mind that — Egypt not included — many Arab parties are hastening to settle their differences with Israel and the US, and are not prepared to wait for a final settlement on all Arab fronts.

It should be apparent that nobody holds the trump cards. The future of the peace process is still dependent on many factors that are hard to control and harder to predict. One would be ill advised to be either over optimistic, or to neglect the facts.



The illusion of the epoch

It was not until the early '50s that Egyptians started talking of economic development and per capita income growth, rather than of alleviating poverty and dealing with class disparities. The shift has been towards one big illusion, writes Galal Amin

It was once said that it is wrong to judge a person by what he says about himself. If so, then it is equally wrong to judge an era by the way it describes itself. We used to think that the French Revolution had launched the age of liberty, fraternity and equality — the historic role it claimed for itself. Later, however, we discovered that it was a bourgeois revolution, rebelling against the nobility and feudal landlords. The common people gained neither liberty nor equality. The Russian Revolution was once believed to have inaugurated the age of justice and socialism — again, it promoted itself in this way. Later, we found out that its objective function in history was to enable Russia to catch up with other advanced Western countries and lay down an industrial base — which it did, albeit without achieving the other functions it had proclaimed.

When Lord Acton wrote *The Illusion of the Epoch* in the early 1950s, he was not attacking social justice so much as the illusion *that social justice was being brought about. I* do not think it foolish or expedient on my behalf to attempt to dispel similar illusions about so-called economic development. For 50 years now, a strong conviction has prevailed that the countries of the so-called Third World were entering a new epoch, labelled the epoch of development. This claim does not bear scrutiny. Any closer look at what has actually taken place during these 50 years in this part of the world reveals an ugliness *quite at odds with what the nice word* "development" is intended to denote.

I, for one, began to wonder whether this term was not as misleading as those used to describe the French and Russian revolutions. Is it possible that what is happening in the Third World now is not development but "Westernisation", dubbed development only in order to mislead? The more I think about this, the more convinced I become that my suspicions are not unfounded. This, however, *does not mean that I am against development* — God forbid.

No one in his right mind would be against the poor growing rich, the hungry being fed, and the ignorant receiving an education. Yet one can be for all these things and still against Westernisation, which is in essence the substitution of one set of values pertinent to a specific culture and civilisation for another. The only justification for this is that it enables those of the dominant culture to *increase their profit rates.*

Arthur Lewis defended development under the pretext that it widens the range of choices available to humanity, thus making it a desirable object in itself. He argued that an increased income affords individuals a wider scope of choices. The problem with this argument is that it defends development as it should be, not as it really occurred; it is a defence of a most abstract idea of development, in the very narrow sense of *increasing available commodities and services* without asking the bigger questions: the nature of these commodities and services, the means by which they are being increased, and the origin of this increase. Widening the range of choices, Lewis's main argument, is acceptable as long as we remain on that level of abstraction.

Nevertheless, any development that limits itself to increasing the income of some people (who were privileged in the first place) *and leaves the rest as poor as before (if not* poorer), which wreaks chaos within a dominant culture, displacing many cherished values — this development, even if coupled with an increase in per capita income on the level of society as a whole, does not expand the range of choices. To describe it as development is sheer hypocrisy.

In the late '40s and early '50s, the term development was still unheard of. At the time, the major problems of Egypt were always *expressed in terms of three inter*related concepts: poverty, ignorance and disease. The usage of these terms was very different from their usage within the context of "development". When we used to talk about poverty, it meant poverty of the poor, and not per capita income, which is now the criterion for poverty and wealth. Ignorance meant the spread of illiteracy among the majority of Egyptians; the word disease was used in the same context.

In a book which appeared this year, *Problems of Egyptian Society as Seen by the Press, 1945-1952*, the author, Nagwa Hussein Khalil, makes a survey of the main social problems in Egypt as they featured in the press during this period. She shows that the number one issue at the time was inequality between classes (mentioned 532 times according to her survey). The other issues, in order of importance, were: education (336 times); prices (332); social ills (296); women's status and role (278); health problems and malnutrition (229); employment (215); housing (76); then, at the very bottom of the list, the population problem (12). In this list, there is no mention of "development", i.e. raising per capita income on the national level.

This clearly indicates that, at the time, we had not yet been subjected to the brainwashing which now makes us lump rich and poor together, all in the basket of per capita *income, and dedicate all our efforts to the* sole aim of raising the level of per capita income. We dedicate ourselves to this aim instead of trying to alleviate the plight of the really poor and provide houses only for the homeless (which is a very different concept from developing the Northern Coast with uninhabited villas that nobody needs). The same goes for providing services to the needy: potable water and health services, for instance, should be made available to those *who are deprived thereof. Only when we* achieve these goals can we think of other things. On the other hand, when the target is raising per capita income we simply go from one five-year plan to the next, each time renewing the promise that the basic needs of the poor will be fulfilled next time around. We boast of our achievements, yet at the same time the condition of the poor is presented as something beyond our control. And despite all these achievements, the *goals set 50 years ago were never achieved.*

It is worth noting that in the last 50 years per capita income in Egypt has risen from $100 to approximately $650. Taking into account the rate of inflation and the exchange rate of the Egyptian currency, this actually means that, in the past 50 years, per capita income in Egypt has increased threefold. Despite this increase, many Egyptians still go to sleep hungry every night and are unable to find a suitable home. The percentage of open unemployment is much higher than it was 50 years ago. Many Egyptian villages have no readily accessible source of potable water. Seventeen governorates do not receive the clean water they need, while others, like Kafr Al-Sheikh, Assiut and Damietta, receive only one third of their requirements. Of course, the situation would have improved had population growth been checked; but it is equally certain that we would have been immeasurably better off had we concentrated our efforts on basic questions such as feeding the hungry and providing jobs for the unemployed.

It is also possible that population growth would have decreased substantially had we concentrated our efforts on eradicating the poverty of the truly poor and not on the growth rate. Concentrating on increasing the growth rate, we have built houses that do not find occupants, factories that provide very few job opportunities, schools that teach nobody and *universities from which graduates* emerge ignorant. We produce TV programmes that exacerbate mental lethargy; we increase oil production in order to import cars that pollute the environment and for which ugly flyovers are built. All this while failing to address the basic problems of society, promising they will be addressed soon, and pleading for yet another chance. Needless to say, the problems are never addressed.

The problems have not diminished; only *Westernisation continues to increase. O lib*erty, how many crimes are committed in your name? The adage also applies to "development". The list of crimes committed in its name seems endless. Only a few days ago, I came across a booklet very recently published by the World Bank in three languages, entitled "Claiming the Future: Choosing Prosperity in the Middle East and North Africa". It paints a very rosy picture for the area by the year 2010 — if the countries of this "region" will only listen to the voice of reason and cooperate amongst themselves in all manner of joint projects, throwing open the doors to foreign trade and investment, and if they only apply the structural adjustment programmes prescribed by the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund (IMF). One of the main remedies prescribed, incidentally, is the sale of the public sector.

What I found peculiar is that, although the whole Middle East-North Africa region has been concocted to include Israel, the name of that country appears only rarely in the booklet. The names of the other countries in that hybrid region feature prominently. There are innumerable figures regarding the high percentage of poor and unemployed in Egypt. There are also figures concerning the number of those enjoying "protected jobs" within the public sector, which must clearly be made redundant immediately. There are also figures put forward to demonstrate the success achieved by countries like Tunisia, Jordan and Morocco after they had carefully followed the advice of the World Bank and the IMF (no mention, of course, of unemployment figures in these three "success stories"). As for Israel, there are only cursory footnotes and very few tables detailing any of the facts and figures which apply to that country.

I have no doubt that this report was written with the purpose of inaugurating the Israeli epoch, which the countries of the so-called Middle East and North Africa region are invited to join. There no longer seems to be any mention of an Arab region, which has been replaced by a huge geographical area extending from the ocean to the Gulf, and where a state called Israel happens, by sheer coincidence, to exist. *Also by sheer coincidence, per capita in*come in that state amounts to 20 times that in a country like Egypt.

But the report does not single it out as any different from the neighbouring countries, and goes on to discuss the region as a whole, as if it were a homongeneous entity sharing common hopes and aspirations, where everybody may reap equal benefits from development based on cooperation and peace. Every country in the region will prosper; and if one *prospers at the expense of the others, this* does not merit the attention of the report. Here again we find the very same logic as in the case of "national development", which will make the whole nation prosper — regardless of whether the poor grow poorer for the sake of raising per capita income levels.

The World Bank report concludes: "The beneficiaries from the policies described here include the unemployed, the vast number of new entrants into the labour force, the poor *and those working in the informal sector.*" This is quite amusing. The writers seem to be telling us that by 2010, if the countries of the region cooperate, sell off the public sector and throw open the doors to foreign investment and commodities, everything will be just fine. The lie continues: the poor are invoked in order to increase the wealth of the rich. But past experience has shown that the poor and unemployed will continue to suffer the same fate, if not worse; and if we discover that Israel is the sole beneficiary of this whole plan, the World Bank will surely not find it difficult to issue another booklet, decorated with an equally attractive picture (this one shows two pretty, dark young girls wearing clean uniforms and drinking milk), and probably entitled "Towards an Even Better Future for our Children and our Grandchildren". In this as yet unpublished report, the World Bank will seek to drive us even further down the same ominous road, until we reach 2050, or even 2070, poorer and more subjugated, in the service of the Israeli economy, singing a chorus in praise of development and clear increases in per capita income.

The writer is professor of economics at the American University in Cairo.

Soapbox

A stitch in time

Two significant results of last month's parliamentary elections warrant alarm. The first is the almost total exclusion of opposition forces and the frustration and bitterness springing from this. The second is the rise of a new player to a prevalent role on the stage of national politics, namely violence.

A war of words has followed, reflecting a debate on only one question: whether the government or influential circles within the establishment have engineered these two phenomena on purpose.

To my mind, this has become a somewhat irrelevant issue. The *true issue is whether the state takes it as its own responsibility to* provide a remedy to the twin problems of frustration and violence before they explode beyond the control of anyone, including both the government and the opposition.

It is patently clear that such an explosion would be to the detriment of the whole nation and every responsible party in it.

The remedy is clear: re-engage in a serious national dialogue over what took place during the election and discuss how the Egyptian legal and political arena can be restructured so as to secure the peaceful and participatory evolution of the political and social system in Egypt.

Political and constitutional reforms are urgently needed. Rejection of this proposition may have been valid before the elections. After the elections, however, the entire world is in consensus on the fact that reforms cannot be deferred much longer. Reforms may seem distasteful but their absolute necessity must be recognised.

Other comparative experiences worldwide demonstrate that political reforms are better introduced early on. Late reforms, that is reforms that come after centrifugal forces have finished fragmenting societies, do little to salvage the political community and social order.

Internal peace and peaceful evolution are the crux of the whole matter. The opposition has a duty to commit itself to this. But the state has a duty to address the same issue with adequate vigour and the spirit of initiative.



This week's Soapbox speaker is the deputy director of the Al-Ahram Centre for Political and Strategic Studies.

Mohamed El-Sayed Said

To The Editor

Violence doesn't pay!

Sir- The political analysts who assessed the outcome of the 29 November election (*Al-Ahram Weekly*, 30 November - 6 December), agreed upon the fact that violence is a negative phenomenon and an indication of a lack of maturity in society. Unfortunately, the violence which occurred during the second round of polling only re-emphasised their points.

In spite of the fact that the elections were both free and fair, losers attacked the winners. A candidate who has no popularity should bear in mind that all he can expect is defeat. One candidate, looking for a justification for his defeat, stated that he was not competing with an opponent, but with the state. Another candidate trucked-in supporters wielding swords, knives and sticks. No doubt, it is unthinkable to vote for those who play dirty. Vulgarity and barbarism are the tools of the weak.

Zarif Kamel Hakim
English language teacher
El-Daher Secondary School for Girls
Cairo

Seeds of destruction

Sir- I really enjoyed reading Tarek El-Tablawy's article "Desperately American" (*Al-Ahram Weekly*, 30 November- 6 December), in which he elaborately explored the various problems facing Arab Americans and members of other minority groups in the US. Apart from those problems related to cultural assimilation, *alienation*, conformity, identity and the illusion of the great American melting pot, it is quite obvious that American society has long been suffering from more serious problems whether racial, *ethnic*, or economic.

America's stupendous technological advancement is only a deceptive appearance. This society is decaying and doomed to collapse because it carries within itself the seeds of its own destruction and annihilation. Strangely enough, the US pays no heed to its own worrisome problems.

Instead it is still trying to act as the world's guardian. Many sociologists and social scientists warn against the horrible possible consequences of an imminent clash between the different ethnic groups in the "American pot". Calls for independence and self-determination will, sooner or later, emerge in different parts of the States. Considering what happened in Quebec, the US is not much different. Will the US really be able to "reconstruct relations between the various ethnic and racial groups?" I think not.

Essam Hanna Wahba
Salam Language School
Assiut

Translation wanted

Sir- Thank you very much for Nur Elmessiri's fascinating review of Radwa Ashour's trilogy "Granada, Mariama and Departure" (*Al-Ahram Weekly*, 23-29 November). As a non-Arabic speaker, I found the *Weekly*'s review, book excerpt, and conversation with the author to be very useful.

As Elmessiri points out, the Moriscos are a potentially "trendy" theme. The era (1492-1609) about which the book is written merits closer examination and I am delighted to read that Ashour's narrative is gripping *enough to pull the reader through the weight* of history.

Let us hope a fine translation will materialise so that non-Arabic speakers may enjoy the trilogy as well.

Mona Radwan
Zamalek

Reflections

By Hani Shukrallah

Transition transpired

Does the composition of the new parliament tell us anything at all about the nature of the political sphere in Egypt at the end of the '90s? I believe that it does — so much so that, unlike most other disheartened commentators, I am of the view that, already, the new parliament has well and truly earned the historic character accidentally bestowed upon it by the Gregorian calendar, as the parliament that will lead us to the threshold of a new century, and a new millennium.

True, there is much in this parliament that rather stretches our credulity. I am no fan of the Muslim Brotherhood, or of any other Islamist political force in this country or elsewhere, but I find myself incapable of making the kind of giant leap of faith that is necessary for one to believe that the political support enjoyed by the Egyptian left — which for the past 20 odd years has been in almost continuous discussion of 'the crisis of the left' — is five times as strong as that of both the Muslim Brotherhood and the Labour Party.

Let us grant then that a more temperate electoral climate would have resulted in a considerably greater Islamist parliamentary representation — in my estimate no more than 30 to 40 seats, which, while small and definitely no threat to the ruling NDP's parliamentary monopoly, is still 30 to 40 times the current figure — as well as a higher opposition representation as a whole.

Notwithstanding the somewhat distortive effects of the above, the new parliament, in my view, has come to adequately reflect what is truly essential about the Egyptian political scene in the late '90s, and in so doing seems to have settled, for the time being at least, a question that has bewildered political analysts of the Egyptian domestic scene for over a decade.

The bafflement lay in the following:

Egypt had embarked on a process of transition from the populist authoritarian regime of Nasser towards a more *liberal* style of government as early as 1975, when Sadat launched the three platforms of the left, right and centre within the then single legal party, the Arab Socialist Union. A year later, the platforms were transformed into fully fledged legal political parties. In other *Third World countries similar processes* almost always led either to a retrenchment of authoritarianism, usually under different forms, or to a gradual, and often fairly rapid, expansion of the space for liberal democracy, ultimately leading to the transformation of the political system and the establishment of a more or less liberal democratic formula in which political power changes hands between two or more political parties.

Initially, the process in Egypt promised to move along similar lines. During the first few years, the newly founded opposition parties and their fledgling press seemed to have an impact on the political process. The mere fact that the process of democratisation was crisis-ridden, with almost daily clampdowns and showdowns, seemed a sure indication that big choices were at stake, that the nation was being obliged to choose between full political liberalisation or a retrenchment of authoritarianism, which in any case could not be a return to Nasserist-style populism.

With the rise of Islamism — initially fostered by Sadat's regime — an additional dimension entered the equation. Nasser's populist authoritarianism seemed destined to give way to some form of liberal democracy, but this could be just an interim phase, giving way in turn to a new form of populist authoritarianism, a theocratic form.

But none of these scenarios came to be. And for nearly 15 years political analysts at home and abroad have been trying to explain why. Analysts spoke of a stalled process of political liberalisation, and tried to explain away the hitches by enumerating various 'exceptional' circumstances. Liberal dogma was crestfallen that economic and political liberalisation were marching out of step, but its proponents continued to insist that with sufficient economic liberalisation, liberal democracy in the political sphere was bound to follow. Meanwhile, Islamic revolutions were predicted at every turn.

But as the calendar kept turning over one leaf after another, bringing us closer and closer to the end of the century, analysts found themselves having to explain away nearly a quarter of that century as somehow 'exceptional', as 'retardation'. Indeed the transition was *fast becoming of longer duration than that which* was being transposed.

The 1995 elections were by no means a historic turning point, an end to the transition. They merely underlined that a transition had already transpired, we just hadn't noticed. What analysts failed to realise was that — all their theories and models notwithstanding — the Egyptian middle class, the fount of authority in the country for the best part of the century, was not really interested in government through the political sphere, but rather in access to the state through direct ties with the bureaucracy. Privatisation, not liberalisation, is the catchword.

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Cast with charm

Cairo: Golo has been there. **Nur Elmessiri** revisits it with him



On Youssef El-Guindi Street, facing the Bustan multi-storey car park, there is a gallery called Cairo-Berlin. You can go down the steps and into the gallery. In the gallery there are drawings by Golo under the title *Sandouq Al-Dunya* (The Box of the World); there is also a big red box with little round windows, a *sandouq al-dunya*. If you wish, you can look at the pictures inside it.

What is remarkable about Golo's drawings is that they are both funny and warm. They do not poke fun at something or someone but radiate hilarity: they are not ironic but ludic. For irony to work, someone must be at a remove — distanced, condescending and at least an arm's length away, with a stick to poke. The ludic temperament, however, does not indulge in condescension but in hilarity which softens and sometimes eradicates boundaries. Caricature can go in either of two directions, though to produce them without the slightest hint of a sneer is a difficult task indeed. This is what Golo does.

He is someone who has looked, who can still look, and who is fond of what he sees. He is faithful to the details that have happened upon his field of vision. In Golo's tolerant and open armed eyesite, Ninja Turtle T-shirts coexist happily with *Bismillah* inscriptions on shop fronts and a street cat about to have its whiskers pulled by a crawling infant. Children in pyjamas stroll barefooted across the pictures because barefooted children in pyjamas stroll across the street. A Flit cockroach spray container has been used as part of a *shisha* and is wonderfully red and black. There is an absence of sentimentality, the better to get to the heart of the matter.

Nor is the heart of the matter anything as glib as mere realism. Golo is not out to debunk the world because the world, in Cairo at least, resists brutal demystification. *Umm* Kulthum will sing to a Cairo rooftop audience consisting of a man in western dress with prayer beads, his wife in a *galabia* and head kerchief, her bare-bottomed child, another man, a *maalim* probably, smoking illegal substances from a Flit constructed *shisha* and his *sabi*, a chicken and a cock and two sheep. From a radio, *Umm* Kulthum, *Kawkab Al-Sharq* (the Star of the East), will emerge in white, with handkerchief, singing the all time favorite classical Arabic poem *Al-Atlal*. She emerges and will continue emerging. The epic scene with the mounted Abu Zeid El-Hilali battling his foes, framed by the narrative bubble emerging from the mouth of the *rawi* (story-teller) will be as congested as the *qahwa* in which the story-teller fabulates his narrative. In another work, the epic scene might be the central panel of the triptych, with one side panel showing the Pied Piper-like story-teller walking down the street followed by his fans, the other showing him asleep in a dilapidated shack amidst the bits and pieces, the props, with which he constructs his fictional *dunya*. But in a triptych, hierarchy notwithstanding, nothing is higher or deeper than anything else.

Take a peek in the actual *sandouq al-dunya*, the box of the world. There is nothing out of this world in it. Street scenes. By night. By day. People buying and selling and working in workshops. Nothing that you haven't seen before — but wonderful nevertheless. And as the strip is wound before you through the familiar cityscape to a *kaaba*, camel and plane *hajj* drawing on a yellowish wall, the wall suddenly becomes the sky in which the plane is flying — a vista of glamorous Cairo. No people, just buildings and minarets at sunset as seen from high up on the Moqattam or from a rooftop. Glamourous, but recognisably Cairo.

Even here the perspective has nothing to do with privilege. The empty vista and the congested street scene occupy the same horizontal plane. You watch a black and white Abdel-Halim Hafez film on TV with the three girls in blue school uniform and white head scarf carrying their folders with pink hearts. The spectacle is shared. And lest you look at them and not with them, the aerials protruding from the picture frame put you in place — in theirs. Everyone is flattered. In an art gallery you might momentarily feel "above it all"; but so are the rooftop spectators of the Ismail Yassin film.

If there is any sense of being in the privileged position of a spectator, you needn't feel guilty. You are looking out the window of a moving vehicle — not necessarily a fancy car, a taxi, shared perhaps, a microbus — as you behold the shop fronts and the "real world out there". Golo's frames suggest this. Within them there are people in microbuses also beholding a spectacle: you, or the poor taxi driver who has just been stopped by a policeman.

Golo is aware of the infinite variety of fictions. There are epic stories told by the *rawi*. There are old, black and white films from the "good old days". There are uncensored satellite television films shown at *Qahwit Layali'l Dish* (Dish Nights Cafe). Matching the multiple kinds of fictions are the multiple modes of enframing them. Some of the frames Golo uses are of the simple glass and clips type. Some have those toy-like, home-made antennae shooting out of them. Some are round, almost window-like. Some suggest the woodwork of Islamic arts and crafts.

But neither does Golo's work suggest that everything is pure illusion or that all is mere fiction or that the world is a mere shadow play produced by an idiot. You look into the *sandouq al-dunya*. You are put into the position of a child for whom the world has not yet become too familiar and hence for which contempt has not been bred. What you see in the *sandouq* is what you see everyday on your way to work and back. But how can the familiar be a cause for wonder? And is it for real? When you look out of the mini-bus, is the real world *in* the mini-bus or *out* there as you pass? Are the moving depictions of street scenes *in* the *sandouq al-dunya* the real world or is the real world *out* there on the stationary bench on which you sit in the gallery?

You leave the gallery and you are out in Bustan St. The shops are still there. You recognise them and are enchanted by them. Cairo has not had sepia tones dumped on it by Golo. It has not been transfigured. It is a close friend you have not seen for quite a while and now that you are meeting again, you realise that the friend has not really changed that much. For that, you feel grateful. If Golo has brought about any revelation, it is that things are as they are — wonderful and wondrous if one would only care to take a look. *Umm Al-Dunya* or not, Golo would agree with Youssef Chahine that Cairo is Illumined By Her People. And *Sandouq Al-Dunya* has put you in the frame of mind to feel that *al-dunya* is indeed a fine place in which to be. It is worth your time of day.

Golo, Cairo. Cairo, Golo. Enchanté.

Music

Gala concert celebrating Reda El-Wakil, the winner of the International Song Competition of Toulouse, France and the Egyptian State Prize for Encouragement: Cairo Opera Company and Cairo Opera Orchestra; Conductor, Ivan Filev; Sayed Darwish Theatre, Alexandria; 8 December

Cheers across the boards

David Blake on history in the making

Meet me at the Sayed Darwish Theatre. A friendly offer gladly accepted. But where is the Sayed Darwish Theatre? Found! Quietly hidden from the outside world and the bustle of this city of living legends. Dead or alive, it is all the same to Alexandria, which anoints all cultures.

Now comes Reda El-Wakil of the noble dark bass baritone voice to receive his accolades.

He is a star. So of course is Alexandria. But Sayed Darwish Theatre? It is the treasure that got away — almost. If you have a treasure, to forget about it is worse than losing it. No one seems to have bothered about the Sayed Darwish for years. Sometimes a concert, other times a play. Almost forgotten. The theatre is a survivor. It comes from the grand days, the bad old days, the lost but not forgotten days. Yet somehow it never became history.

Soon the concert will begin. People arrive through the streets, enter, pay and go into the auditorium. Everyday people they used to be called — certainly no long dark limos. There is nothing shiny or glittering about this audience. Wherever fashion is, it certainly isn't here, even though the concert is for a reason: Egyptian singer receives world honour. At the entrance people are still paying, going in, and from where? At least from the streets. Can you imagine, the streets? They walked here. People walked! Well-dressed but nothing fancy. Not an elite, but a citizen layer of Alexandria. Because it's cold, they wear coats and pullovers. Ties? Yes and no. Plenty of young. No pretension, but sharp interest is being shown.

For God's sake, it's an audience — a real one. Not ambassadorial, commercial, political or social, it is an audience of the living. They want to enjoy themselves at an operatic concert. Better hurry in. The theatre is filling.

And so, all in a wave of the magic wand, as you enter, going down the main aisle to the seats, Sayed Darwish reveals itself. It's a theatre, a true and a dream one. Vulgar say the experts, who have probably never seen an opera. No acoustics. Better let it sink. To where? Into the harbour where it can join a few of the other legends of Alexandria: the Pharos or the Library or the burial furniture of Alexander the Great. Sad, but Darwish is not in this league. It hasn't died yet, isn't even a true legend. It is nothing — sadly nothing. Last legs, yes, but not yet a certified corpse of quality. How, therefore, and by what means must it die? Resembling London's Allambrah, which fell victim to a cinematic Molloch and became a nameless lump of concrete, nothing so grand as insurance or cinema awaits the sad Darwish. It will move out of Alexandria, like a piece of *robavechia*, a victim of rheumatoid arthritis, for Alexandria is damp as the Caesars of Rome found to the discomfort of their knees.

The lights have lowered. The Gala has begun. Another aspect of Darwish now comes to life. Like a true living theatre, it sinks into luminescence — not dark exactly, but alive with prospects. After the Overture, Rossini's *Barber of Seville* given by the newly formed Cairo Opera Orchestra under its maestro Ivan Filev, Walid Korayem comes from the wings to stage centre to sing Donizetti's *Una furtiva lagrima*. Topical for the Sayed Darwish Theatre. Korayem has come into the magic focus of its confidence. The aria, too high for him as yet, nevertheless goes well. Though beset with beginners' problems, his vitality will point the way if teachers cannot. After all, think of Del Monaco. Try the records.

Neveen Allouba and the star himself Reda El-Wakil sang a duet from *Don Giovanni*. The Don suits him but Susannah is no longer the right sphere for her. Allouba is beginning to assert herself into areas long suggested. Bizet's *Pearl Fishers*, hopefully promised for later in the year, had Hossam Mustafa to sing one of the rewarding baritone arias. He was fine and deserved his reception.

The audience had begun to assert itself. It moved around between items, as is done in Naples and Barcelona. The theatre looks exciting and inviting. Some try out the view from the first tier boxes.

Verdi's *Masked Ball*, with Iman Mustafa to sing Amelia's long, terrifying aria in which she hopes to dispel her guilty love of the king, began. Mustafa is becoming a new singer, voice under control, the judder at the sides of the notes almost gone. Thus comes the promised thrust of its proper dramatic soprano. The dreaded high notes were done with ease and, best of all, her personality shows charisma worthy of the voice.

Another Verdi heroine, Violetta of *Traviata*, brought Allouba again in the big Act I scene. Does she want life, pleasure or love? Not all three are possible at the same time. So begins her sad career. Allouba has come out from her particular problems. This was the best Act I *Traviata* she has ever given. It was completely successful, replete with the warmth and sympathy she gives to everything she sings. The Darwish stage offered her the intimacy as well as the space to project her exact and interesting Balzacian study of this heroine.

The same situation arose when Mona Rafla followed with Gilda's aria from *Rigoletto*. The role of Manon is waiting for her.

Further into *Rigoletto*, the Quartet, with Rafla, Awatef El-Sharkawi (mezzo), Hassan Kami and Reda El-Wakil. This was the grandiose view of *Rigoletto*. Filev rose to the tragedy and it ceased to be a show-piece for four singing birds and became something infinitely more grand. Filev, together with the orchestra, was making his debut in Alexandria.

The audience by this time was vocal as well as manual in showing its pleasure. The Darwish was more than half-full with a lively, uninhibited audience. Everyone was surpassing themselves.

After the intermission, Reda El-Wakil did his pièce de résistance: King Phillip's passionate lament of his futile imprisoned life. El-Wakil's voice is made for this. The chilly escurial came alive in the Darwish. The glooms and rooms rose before us. Every word was clear and felt. A noble singer with a rare power of projection.

More Verdi, and the best of him, with *Trovatore*. A mother's chilling narrative of the fiery stories that have haunted her life. Awatef El-Sharkawi was in fine voice. She always has beautiful tone but tonight she also acted the distracted mother. Great reception.

Carmen, with the first of Michaela's two arias sung by Ratiba El-Hefni, arrived. She can sometimes waver, as on this night, but unfailingly shoots her arrow dead straight. Bull's eye. The climax was pathos without flaw and her long high floated note was the perfect note of the night. She never fusses and like a true soprano delivers the goods when needed. A phenomenon, and loved by the increasingly vocal audience.

Gihane Fayed sang one of Liu's two arias from *Turandot*. She was loud and forceful — a Puccini soprano, more suited to Turandot herself than to the doormat Liu.

Hassan Kami, a moving spirit in this concert, sang Cavaradossi's song to the Stars of Rome. He too is on the change. The voice lately has been in shadow — from silver and gold to bronze. The crowd ovated and he deserved every shout.

Two Puccini arias — Tosca for Iman Mustafa and Mimi of *Bohème* for Ratiba El-Hefni. Mustafa was a very distinguished and dramatic Tosca. El-Hefni as Mimi sailed along sweet, soft and ironic — goodbye to everything. It was a reminder of her overwhelming Mimi of two years ago. The audience stood up to shout for her.

Finishing was the Stravinsky *Firebird*. It was a hushed and erotic Bird. The Kotschei and the lullaby were given with the correct, dangerous allure. Came the magnificent noise of the finale. All the flags were unfurled and Filev had conquered at the Darwish.

The theatre itself was not host to this happy party. It was the party itself. It drew from the guests the very best they had to offer. They all sang for the star of honour and for the theatre. The Sayed Darwish Theatre is not finished. It, like El-Hefni, is a phenomenon. As the singers and their maestro stood in a line, happy, relaxed and quite thrilled by the warmth and love their art had received, it was moving in the extreme — a line of heroes and heroines in a theatre whose style and beauty deserves preservation and respect.

Listings

EXHIBITIONS

Ange Khalil Heiss (Paintings)
Espace Gallery, 1 Al-Sherifein St, Downtown. Tel 393 1699. Daily exc Fri, 10am-2pm & 5pm-8pm. Until 24 Dec.

Adli Rizkallah (Watercolours)
Khan Al-Maghrabi Gallery, 18 Al-Mansour Mohamed St, Zamalek. Tel 340 3349. Daily exc Sun, 10am-3pm & 5pm-8.30pm. Until 24 Dec.

Group Exhibition
Doroub Gallery, 4 Latin America St, Garden City. Tel 354 7951. Daily 10am-2pm & 5pm-8pm. Until 25 Dec.
Thirty-three artists, including Ibrahim Ghazala, Enji Aflatoun, Adel Thabet, Joachina Casses and Gamal El-Segini under the title Landscapes.

Golo
Cairo-Berlin Gallery, 17 Youssef Al-Guindi St, Bab Al-Louk. Tel 393 1764. Daily exc Sun, 12pm-8pm. Until 25 Dec.
Golo, a cartoonist for several Egyptian magazines, takes a look at life in the coffee shops.

Leila El-Hakim (Collages)
Round Gallery of the Fine Arts Syndicate, Opera House Grounds, Gezira. Tel 342 0594. Daily 10am-1.30pm & 4.30pm-8.30pm. Until 28 Dec.

Timothy Keating
Sony Gallery, AUC, Al-Sheikh Rihan St. Tel 357 5436. Daily exc Fri & Sat, 9am-12pm & 6pm-9pm. Until 28 Dec.
Black and white photographs exhibited under the title Under The Blazing Sun.

Mohamed Taha Hussein (Paintings)
Salama Gallery, 36A Ahmed Orabi St, Mohandessin. Tel 346 3242. Daily 10am-2pm & 5pm-8.30pm. Until 28 Dec.

Wagdi Habashi (Paintings) & **Ossama Mohamed** (Glasswork)
Extra Gallery, 3 Al-Nessim St, Zamalek. Tel 340 6293. Daily 10am-2pm & 5pm-8pm. Until 30 Dec.

Group Exhibition
Al-Hanager, Opera House Grounds, Gezira. Tel 340 6861. Daily 9am-9pm. Until 30 Dec.

Birth of The Movies
British Council, 192 Al-Nil St, Agouza. Tel 354 3281. Daily, 9am-9pm. Until 31 Dec.

Ali Metwalli (Paintings)
Lobby of Al-Ahram Main Building, Al-Galaa St, Boulaq. Tel 5786 100/400. Daily 9am-9pm. Until 31 Dec.

Rainer Werner Fassbinder (Documents)
Al-Hanager, Opera House Grounds, Gezira. Tel 340 6861. Daily 10am-9pm. Until 1 Jan.

General Exhibition
Zamalek Arts Centre, 1 Al-Maahad Al-Swisri St, Zamalek. Tel 340 8211. Daily exc Fri, 10am-1pm & 7pm-10pm. Until 5 Jan.

The Egypt of The Past
Italian Cultural Centre, 3 Al-Sheikh Al-Marsafi St, Zamalek. Tel 340 8791. Daily 10am-1.30pm & 5pm-8.30pm. Until 6 Jan.
Photography exhibition of monuments and landscapes from the archives of Alberto Manodori and the Egyptian Museum of Torino.

Adel El-Siwi (Paintings)
Mashrabiya Gallery, 8 Champollion St, Downtown. Tel 778 623. Daily exc Fri, 11am-8pm. Until 11 Jan.
Recent works by a leading contemporary artist.

Omar Hilal (Photographs)
Lobby of the Jameel Center, AUC, Al-Sheikh Rihan St. Tel 354 2968. Daily 9am-9pm. Until 15 Jan.

The Museum of Mr and Mrs Mohamed Mahmoud Khalil
1 Kafour Al-Akhshid St, Dokki. Tel 336 2376. Daily exc Mon. 10am-6pm.
Egypt's largest collection of nineteenth century European art, amassed by the late Mahmoud Khalil, including works by Courbet, Van Gogh, Gauguin, Manet and Rodin.

Egyptian Museum
Tahrir Sq, Downtown. Tel 575 4319. Daily exc Fri, 9am-4.30pm, Fri 9am-11.30am, 1.30pm-4.30pm.
An outstanding collection of Pharaonic and Ptolemaic treasures and the controversial mummies' room.

Coptic Museum
Mar Girgis, Old Cairo. Tel 362 8766. Daily exc Fri, 9am-4pm; Fri 9am-11am, 1pm-4pm.
Founded in 1910, the museum houses the finest and largest collection of Coptic art and artefacts in the world.

Islamic Museum
Port Said St, Ahmed Maher St, Bab Al-Khalq. Tel 390 9930/390 1520. Daily exc Fri, 9am-4pm; Fri 9am-11.30am, 1.30pm-4pm.
A vast collection of Islamic arts and crafts including *mashrabiya*, lustreware ceramics, textiles, woodwork and coins, drawn from Egypt's Fatimid, Ayyubid and Mamluke periods and other countries in the Islamic world.

Museum of Modern Egyptian Art
Opera House Grounds, Gezira. Tel 340 6861. Daily exc Mon, 10am-1pm & 5pm-9pm.
A permanent display of paintings and sculpture charting the modern art movement in Egypt, from its earliest pioneers to latest practitioners.

Mohamed Nagui Museum
Château Pyramids, 9 Mahmoud Al-Guindi St, Giza.
A museum devoted to the paintings of Mohamed Nagui (1888-1956).

Mahmoud Mukhtar Museum
Tahrir St, Gezira. Daily exc Sun and Mon, 9am-1.30pm.
A permanent collection of work by the sculptor Mahmoud Mukhtar (d 1934), whose granite monument to Saad Zaghloul stands near Qasr Al-Nil Bridge.

FILMS

Italian Films
Italian Cultural Centre, 3 Al-Sheikh Al-Marsafi St, Zamalek. Tel 340 8791.
Jesus of Nazareth II, *24 Dec, 6pm.*
Directed by Franco Zeffirelli and starring Claudia Cardinale.
Dramma Della Gelosia, *27 Dec, 6pm.*
Directed by Ettore Scola and starring Marcello Mastroianni.

Cinemas change their programmes every Monday. The information provided is valid through to Sunday after which it is wise to check with the cinemas.

Nine Months
Cairo Sheraton, Galaa St, Giza. Tel 360 6081. Daily 10.30am, 1pm, 3pm, 6pm & 9pm, midnight. Al-Salam, 65 Abdel-Hamid Badawi St, Heliopolis. Tel 293 1072. Daily 3.30pm, 6.30pm & 9.30pm.



Brigitta Schildknecht

Police Academy
Odeon, 4 Dr Abdel-Hamid Said St, Downtown. Tel 575 8797. Daily 10.30am, 2.30pm, 5.30pm & 8.30pm.

Sniper
Karim I, 15 Emadeddin St, Downtown. Tel 924 830. Daily 10am, 1pm, 3pm, 6pm & 9pm.

Die Hard III With A Vengeance
Karim II, as above.

Waterworld
Metro, 35 Talaat Harb St, Downtown. Tel 393 3897. Daily 10am, 1pm, 3pm, 6pm & 9pm. Normandy, 31 Al-Ahram St, Heliopolis. Tel 258 0254. Daily 12.30pm, 3.30pm, 6.30pm & 9.30pm. Tahrir, 112 Tahrir St, Dokki. Tel 335 4726. Daily 3pm, 6pm & 9pm.

Spellcaster
Radio, 24 Talaat Harb St, Downtown. Tel 575 6562. Daily 10am, 1pm, 3pm, 6pm & 9pm.

Outbreak
Rivoli I, 26th July St, Downtown. Tel 575 5053. Daily 1pm, 3.30pm, 6.30pm & 9.30pm.

Project Shadowchaser
Rivoli II, as above. Tel 575 5053. Daily 1pm, 3.30pm, 6.30pm, 8pm & 10pm.

Monkey Trouble
Cosmos I, 12 Emadeddin St, Downtown. Tel 779 537. Daily 10am, 1pm, 3pm, 6pm & 9pm. MGM, Kolleyat Al-Nasr Sq, Maadi. Tel 352 3066. Daily 10am, 1pm, 3pm, 6pm & 9pm. Al-Haram, Al-Haram St, Giza. Tel 385 8358. Daily 10am, 1pm, 3pm, 6pm & 9pm.

Dumb & Dumber
Cosmos II, as above.

The Distinguished Gentleman
Ramsis Hilton II, Corniche Al-Nil St. Tel 574 7436. Daily 10.30am, 1.30pm, 3.30pm, 6.30pm & 9.30pm.

Braveheart
Ramsis Hilton I, as above. Daily 1pm, 3.30pm, 6.30pm & midnight. Tiba I, Nasr City. Tel 262 9407. Daily 10.30am, 3.30pm, 6.30pm & 9.30pm.

Abu Zeid Zamanoh (The Abu Zeid of His Time)
Roxy, Roxy Sq, Heliopolis. Tel 258 0344. Daily 10am, 3pm, 6pm & 9pm.

Yom Har Geddan (A Very Hot day)
Tiba II, Nasr City. Tel 262 9407. Daily 10.30am, 3.30pm, 6.30pm & 9.30pm.

Toyour Al-Zalam (Birds of the Dark)
Diana, 17 Al-Alfi St, Emadeddin. Tel 924 727. Daily 10am, 1pm, 3pm, 6pm & 9pm.

Emra'a Hazzat 'Arsh Misr (The Woman Who Shook Egypt's Throne)
Lido, 23 Emadeddin St, Downtown. Tel 934 284. Daily 10am, 1pm, 3pm, 6pm & 9pm.

Al-Garage (The Garage)
Miami, 38 Talaat Harb St, Downtown. Tel 574 5656. Daily noon, 3.30pm, 5.30pm & 8.30pm.

MUSIC

National Arabic Music Ensemble
Small Hall, Opera House, Gezira. Tel 342 0598. 21 Dec, 8pm.
Conducted by Selim Sahab, in commemoration of Umm Kalthoum.

Celebrations for the Cinema Centenary
Small Hall, as above. 21-27 Dec, 8pm.

DANCE

The Nutcracker
Main Hall, Opera House, Gezira. Tel 342 0598. 21 & 23 Dec, 11am.
The Cairo Opera Ballet Troupe, and the Cairo Symphony Orchestra conducted by Ivan Filev, perform their seasonal ritual.

Between Orient and Occident
Al-Ghouri Palace, Al-Azhar. Tel 510 0823. 23 Dec & 27 Dec, 7pm.
Swiss belly-dancer performs with an Egyptian musical band.

THEATRE

Al-Sahera (The Sorceress)
George Abiad, Al-Ataba. Tel 579 1778. Daily 9pm.

Al-Ganzir (The Chain)
Al-Salam, Qasr Al-Aini St. Tel 355 2484. Daily 9pm.

Dastour Ya Siadna (With Your Permission, Masters)
Al-Fann, Ramses St. Tel 578 2444. Daily exc Mon, 9.30pm.
A man pays dearly for running against the president in the elections. Play by Mahmoud El-Toukhi, directed by Galal El-Sharkawi, starring Ahmed Bedeir and Nermine El-Fiqi.

Bazz Nawa'em (Nawa'em's Luck)
Al-Hounager, 16 Al-Tor'a Al-Boulaqeya St. Tel 769 233. Daily exc Tues, 10pm.
Directed by Rozziq El-Bahnassawi, starring Dalal Abdel-Aziz, Mahmoud El-Guindi and So'ad Nasr.

Al-Za'im (The Leader)
Al-Haram, Pyramids Road, Giza. Tel 386 3952. Daily exc Tues, 10pm, Mon & Fri 8pm.
Starring Adel Imam in a play scripted by Farouk Sabri.

Al-Gamila wal Wehshin (The Beautiful and the Ugly)
Al-Zamalek, 13 Shagaret Al-Dor St., Zamalek. Tel 341 0660. Daily 10.30pm, exc Fri 8.30pm.
Starring Laila Oloui as the *gamila* and everyone else as the *wehshin*.

Mama America
Qasr Al-Nil, Qasr Al-Nil St, Tahrir. Tel 575 0761. Daily exc Tues, 10pm, Mon 8pm.
With Mohamed Sobhi, director and lead actor, in a socio-political allegory written by Mahdi Youssef.

Lealy
Balloon, Corniche Al-Nil, Agouza. Tel 347 1718. Daily exc Tues, 9pm.
Musical starring Fayza Kamal, Mohamed El-Helw and Mohamed Nouh.

Ya Nas Efhamou (Try to Understand, People)
Floating Theatre, Fatma Rushdi St. Tel 363 8783. Daily 9.30pm.
Starring Emad Rashad, Dina Abdallah and Hassan Kami.

Ra's Al-Dieek (Cockerel Dance)
Miami, Talaat Harb St. Tel 767 086. Daily exc Tues, 10pm.
Starring Nagah El-Mougi with Mohamed Abul-Hassan and Aida Riad.

Bahloul fi Istanbul (Bahloul in Istanbul)
Hilton Ramsis, Corniche Al-Nil. Tel 574 7435. Daily 10pm, Sun 8pm.
Samir Ghanem stars with Elham Shahine in yet another comedy.

La...Balash Keda (None of That)
Al-Rihani, Emadeddin. Tel 591 3697. Daily exc Wed 10pm, Tues 8.30pm.
Starring Fouad, Mamdouh Abdel-Alim and Hanan El-Torki.

Hazzemni Ya... (Tie Me Up...)
Al-Gezira, Abdel-Aziz Al-Saoud, Manial. Tel 364 4160. Daily 10pm, Fri 8pm.
A musical involving extensive belly-dancing by Fifi Abdou. Also starring Medhat Saleh and Sherif Mounir.

National Circus
Next to the Balloon Theatre, Al-Nil St, Corniche Al-Nil, Al-Agouza. Tel 347 0612. Daily exc Wed, 9pm.

LECTURES

Preservation of Manuscripts, Papers, Papyrus and Parchments
Netherlands Institute for Archaeology and Arabic Studies, 1 Dr Mahmoud Azmi St, Zamalek. Tel 340 0076. 21 Dec, 5.30pm.
Lecture by Nasri Iskander, Egyptian Museum.

Symposium: Comparative Literature in The Arab World
Conference Hall no 78, Faculty of Arts, Cairo University, Giza. Tel 572 8211. 21-22 Dec.

All information correct at time of going to press. However, it remains wise to check with venues first, since programmes, dates and times are subject to change at very short notice.
Please telephone or send information to Listings, *Al-Ahram Weekly*, Galaa St, Cairo. Tel 5786064. Fax 5786089/833.

Compiled by **Injy El-Kashef**

Around the galleries



From the Egyptian Photographic Society Salon

COLOURFUL, technically accomplished, elegant paintings — 39 of them in different sizes — by **Adel El-Siwi** are on exhibit at the **Mashrabia Gallery**. Though the paintings border on the abstract, figures, often alone, occupy their shimmering space.

At the **Atelier**, 25 ink drawings by **Mahmoud Hamed Mohamed** are on show. These synchretically combine elements and symbols from various Egyptian mythologies. Also at the Atelier are photographs of Egyptian scenes by 25 artists participating in the **48th Egyptian Photographic Society Salon**.

Golo, at the **Cairo-Berlin Gallery**, presents an exhibition entitled *Sandouq Al-Dunya*. Though witty, his caricature representations of Cairo streets by day, by night and by story-time are warm and eminently recognisable by *Um El-Dunya* fans. He captures well her *enchanting* quality without ever falling into sop.

Reviewed by **Nagwa El-Ashri**

هكذا من الإهمال

1995 marks the passage of nine centuries since the Crusades were first proclaimed. The cultural and historical legacy of the encounter recently came under scrutiny in a symposium held by the Association of Arab Historiographers



Caught in the crucible

"Books of countless number..."

The great libararies of the Muslim world were among the casualties of the Crusades. Mustafa El-Abbadi plots their downfall

When, in the seventh century, the Arabs rose to power in the Middle East they had to deal with a culture already permeated with the standards of Greek and Roman intellectual achievements. The first century of Arab rule was necessarily concerned with practical problems of administration. A great deal of translation was needed to bridge the language gap between the new Arab governors and their subjects. Both in Syria and in Egypt, Greek continued to be the official language of administration for almost a century, while Arabic translations were only used for officials in the upper echelons. Thus there arose a class of interpreters, versed in Greek, Syriac or Coptic and in Arabic, at the disposal of the Arab rulers.

Beside the immediate needs of administration, there is evidence that the Arabs were equally interested, from an early date, in the transmission into Arabic of the intellectual achievements of the classical and other oriental civilisations. Ibn Al-Nadim mentions that Khalid ibn Yazid ibn Moawiya, a distinguished member of the Omayyad dynasty "ordered a group of Greek philosophers living in Egypt, to translate medical books from Greek and Coptic into Arabic". "This," Ibn Al-Nadim concludes by saying, "was the beginning of translation in Islam."

The great Omayyad reformer Caliph Abdel-Malik ibn Marwan, who started administrative Arabisation, is reported to have set up a special department for translation. His son and successor, Hisham ibn Abdel-Malik continued his father's work and we are told that his secretary, Salem, translated Aristotle's *Letters to Alexander*, amounting to 100 pages. This enlightened activity was not continued by the later Omayyads, and so, when the early Abbassid caliphs lent their support to the cause of learning, everything appeared to be new.

On their side, the Abbassids never failed to stress the claim that they were the first to adopt a policy aimed at a widening of the intellectual Arab horizon to embrace foreign learning, especially Greek and Persian. Influenced by this policy, Ibn Khaldun impresses upon us that Caliph Al-Mansur acquired from Byzantium various books of learning including Euclid's *Elements* which Ibn Khaldun mistakenly assumed was the first Greek work to be translated into Arabic. Earlier translations had already taken place as just mentioned, but in many ways the cultural advance under the early Abbassids was new. An important phenomenon on the Islamic cultural scene was the wholehearted commitment of the early Abbassids to the founding of libraries, notably the House of Wisdom (Bayt Al-Hikma) in Baghdad. Though founded by Haroun Al-Rashid, it was his son Al-Maamun who developed the institution from a simple library into a veritable centre of learning. Its existence coincided with an active and unprecedented translation movement. Translations were made from numerous foreign languages in every branch of learning; from Greek, Persian, Sanskrit, Syriac, Armenian and even Ethiopian. Missions in quest of foreign books are repeatedly reported to have been sent by the successive caliphs, Al-Mansour, Al-Rashid, Al-Maamun, as well as by members of the enlightened aristocracy.

A relevant incident which illustrates the new spirit with regard to the acquisition of books is related by the Egyptian author Ibn Nubata, concerning Al-Maamun, who took advantage of his strong political position in order to acquire rare ancient books from foreign countries. Ibn Nubata writes: "According to a treaty concluded with Cyrus, Al-Maamun demanded the Greek collection of books which was locked up in a special house, to be sent to him. The governor of the island consulted with his advisers on the question. All were against dispatching the books except for one bishop," who believed that "'once these sciences of the mind are introduced into a religious state they will cause havoc and stir up factions among its theologians'". Thereupon, the books were sent, and Al-Maamun ordered them immediately to be translated.

The translation movement under the Abbassids was carefully organised and highly specialised. In the House of Wisdom, the ever increasing acquisitions were sorted out and assigned to the various translators according to their specialisation. In a number of cases the translators were scholars in their own right. We are told that Hunayn ibn Ishaq, the best known translator of his time, had full command of Greek, Syriac and Arabic. (It was in Alexandria that he had learnt Greek, a welcome piece of information regarding the survival of Greek scholarship in Alexandria after two centuries of the Arab conquest.) Indeed, Hunayn's knowledge of Greek seems to have been phenomenal; he was once heard reciting Homer to himself in the original (According to Ibn Abi Usaybia, I. 185-189). Hunayn led a distinguished school of translators of whose work scores of manuscripts have survived. Eminent among them are his own son, Ishaq ibn Hunayn (Aristotle's *Physics* and *Ethics*); Al-Batriq (Aristotle's *De Motu Animalium*); Ibn Matar (Ptolemy's *Almagesti*); and Ibn Qaurra, (who revised Hunayn's translations of Euclid and Ptolemy). Certain subjects received more attention than others, such as medicine, philosophy, mathematics, astronomy and the sciences in general. Poetry, drama, religion and history were generally avoided, yet strangely enough, Aristotle's Poetics was translated by Abu Bishir Matta in the tenth century. The example of the Great Library of Baghdad was to be emulated by various dynasts in the various capital cities of the Islamic world. Well-known examples are the Fatimid Library in Cairo, the libraries at Tripoli and Amed in Syria and in the far western wing of Islam, the libraries of Kayrawan, Fez in North Africa, Cordoba, Granada and Toledo in Spain.



Pope Urban II whose speech, given on 27 November 1095, inspired the First Crusade

This extremely fascinating experience of building great libraries and the concurrent flourishing of serious work in the sciences, did not unfortunately survive to its full maturity. By the end of the tenth century there were signs of a loss of vitality and originality. During the following two centuries, the world was in turmoil and at a decisive crossroads. East and West were at loggerheads with one another in what came to be known as the Crusades. There is no doubt that the eleventh and twelfth centuries were crucial in the history of the Crusades as well as decisive in world history. It was during these centuries that the future of the world was to be decided.

For our immediate purpose, two developments — not conspicuously interrelated — were taking place in Europe and the Arab world. The first was military, on the battle field in Palestine, and was decided in favour of the Arabs. The second, cultural, with much more far-reaching consequences, was in favour of the West.

In Western Europe, the flourishing scholastic movement led to a widespread founding of universities in France, Italy, England and Germany. This was the time when the universities of Chartres, Paris, Bologna and Oxford made their early beginnings. Ever since the Carolingian renaissance there had been a conscious effort on the part of various ruling monarchs of Europe to encourage learning. In 1158 the German Emperor Frederick Barbarossa guaranteed safe conduct and privileged treatment for scholars studying in northern Italy.

The ensuing, gradual desacralisation of learning was most graphically illustrated in the transformation of the production of books in the twelfth century. Previously the production of books was largely confined to the monasteries. As a work of penance and devotion, the monastic book of the early Middle Ages consisted of fine parchment, gold leaf, wide margins, painstaking script and artistic illuminations. Such beautiful masterpieces were obviously much too costly and rare for the thousands of masters and students who thronged twelfth century seats of learning. To supply their needs, books had to be "mass" produced by publishers, known as *stationarii*, who employed scores of copyists working at a feverish rate. Illuminations were eliminated, margins reduced, cheaper parchment used, and abbreviations increased within the text. A fresh supply of books for publication was permanently sought after everywhere. By that time it had become known that the great cities in the Muslim world, with their renowned libraries, were repositories of a great wealth of books, especially the ancient books of the Greeks. In the twelfth century, Abelard of Bath, we are told, visited Spain, Greece, Asia Minor and Egypt. He is reported to have been one of the earliest translators of Euclid from Arabic into Latin. The translation from Arabic into Latin became an essential feature of the revival of learning and many works of the Greek classics were made known to Europe at second hand through Arabic translations. Besides Euclid, the works of Hippocrates and Galen, the *Almagesti* of Ptolemy, Aristotle, with the commentaries of Avicenna and Averroes and many others, were assiduously sought after and translated in the West from Arabic into Latin in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries.

In contrast to this picture, development in the Muslim Orient with regard to books and libraries reveals a different story. Certain incidents which coincided with the Crusades in the eleventh and twelfth centuries resulted in the destruction of libraries. The earliest reported event detrimental to a public library was during the great famine which occurred in Egypt around 1070, when the Fatimid Caliph Al-Mustansir was forced to offer for sale thousands of books of the great Fatimid Library in Cairo, in order to pay his Turkish soldiers. On one occasion, Maqrizi reports, he sold "18,000 books on the ancient sciences", and on another, in one day, he carried out of the library twenty-five camel-loads of books to pay off debts to two of his ministers. One portion was estimated at 5,000 dinars, although its actual worth was 100,000 dinars. Maqrizi adds that among those treasures was a world map depicted on a tapestry of woven silk, illustrating the regions of the earth with their cities, mountains, seas, rivers and castles of various sizes. It was highlighted by pictures of Mecca and Medina. At the bottom corner was inscribed: "Made by order of Caliph Al-Muiz in [A.H.] 353 [c. A.D. 959] worth 1022 dinars". In this way "books of priceless value and countless number were dispersed throughout different countries".

Another more tragic war-incident happened during the capture of Tripoli on the Syrian coast by the crusaders in 1109. After a siege of six years, the city offered to capitulate on condition that lives and property were safeguarded, which the crusaders promised. But after the surrender, the crusaders, in the words of Ibn Al-Athir, plundered the city and captured treasures from its people and books from its schools beyond count.

On a personal level, similar tragic events occurred during those troubled times. We know of the disaster that befell Osama Ibn Munqiz, the distinguished Muslim general and poet. He had obtained from the King of Jerusalem safe conduct for his family to sail from Egypt to Syria; but off Acre, the king's crusader soldiers stopped the ship and confiscated his entire wealth, which included his private library. With moving brevity, Osama reports in his autobiography the whole incident. He was particularly distressed, not so much by the loss of his money but because of the loss of his library of 4,000 magnificent books. It was this that he reports "left a wound in my heart which cannot be healed as long as I live".

After establishing his rule in Egypt, Saladin found himself in dire need of money to carry on his campaign against the crusaders and to pay off those who had cooperated with him and served him. He therefore donated, as well as offered for sale, many of the treasures he had confiscated. On two occasions, we know that among these treasures were great public libraries. The first instance is reported by two eminent authorities, Maqrizi and Abu-Shama. According to Maqrizi, once Saladin gained control over Egypt (A.D. 1171/567 A.H.), he announced the distribution and sale by auction of the famous Fatimid Library. "The auctioneer, Ibn Surah, took charge of the sale which lasted several years". With obvious sorrow, Maqrizi further quotes from Ibn Abi Tai, that after the capture of the palace by Saladin "of its many treasures, he sold the library which was one of the wonders of the world; and it is said that in the whole Muslim world, there was none to equal that in the Fatimid palace". This incident is further substantiated by the details reported by Abu Shama who quotes Al-Emad, one of Saladin's assistants, who mentioned that the library, at that time, contained 120,000 leather-bound volumes of those immortal ancient books... of these, eight camel-loads were transported to Syria. Thus Saladin liquidated what remained of a library that had once contained, according to Abu Shama, as many as two million volumes, before the Fatimids themselves started selling it.

The second instance is reported by Abu Shama in his account of the fate of another library of more than a million books in the Syrian city of Amed, (now in Turkey), on the upper Euphrates, which Saladin, in A.D. 1183/A.H. 579 donated, for services rendered, to his chief supporters. It is reported that Al-Qadi Al-Fadel selected 70 camel-loads from it and that Ibn Qarah Arslan spent seven years in "selling the surplus treasures of Amed".

Two significant points emerge from the above account. First, there was a considerable increase in the demand for books by the West at the time of the Crusades, especially in the twelfth century, when Europe was experiencing a revival of learning, which has been described as the proto-Renaissance.

The two instances of the public library of Tripoli and that of the private one of Osama Ibn Munqiz, indicate that the acquisition of books seems to have been one of the objectives of the crusaders; an objective pursued in the West ever since. It is also obvious that most of the books that were offered for sale found their way outside the Muslim world. Repeated statements, derived from almost contemporary sources — as previously stated — assert that the books which were first sold by Al-Mustansir "were taken by ships in the Nile to Alexandria or to North Africa" or "carried to the rest of the world" (Maqrizi). To be more specific, the books which were sold by Saladin in Cairo, or at least part of them, "were carried to Syria" (Al-Emad, one of Saladin's assistants). As for the books of Amed, "the earth was filled with its treasures" (Abu Shama).

The second point that emerges is the sadness that prevailed in these accounts which is an indication of the widespread feeling of resentment and discontent at the loss of such a priceless legacy of learning.

The writer is a professor of classics at the Department of Graeco-Roman Civilisation, Faculty of Arts, Alexandria University.

Plain Talk

The Cultural Development Fund, under the guidance of its chairman of the board, Samir Gharib, has established itself as one of the main promoters and patrons of art and culture. Established in 1990, the fund has greatly and effectively contributed to the enrichment of the arts. In fact, most of the new cultural edifices in Egypt have been financed or partly financed by the fund. Being a believer that appreciation should go where it is due, I venture here to review some of the fund's achievements.

While I recognise the value of the festivals, seminars and conferences which the fund has initiated or supported, its greatest achievements are in things of permanence, things that are here for posterity. Let me enumerate some of these.

Many public libraries were founded by the fund in a number of provinces in Upper and Lower Egypt. These libraries, in places like Gharbia and Sohag, were built in cooperation with the respective local authorities.

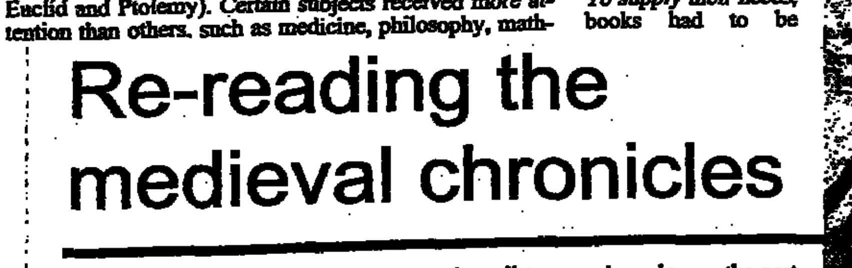
In addition, the old Dar Al-Kutub, the first national library in Egypt, has received a great deal of care from the fund. The historical building in Bab Al-Khalq, with its Islamic design, is a landmark of Cairo. It has one of the richest collections of manuscripts and records of Egypt's history as well as of books published in Egypt. Like many other buildings in Cairo, it suffered due to lack of maintenance. But now, thanks to the fund, the restoration project put forward by Egyptian and foreign experts will soon be implemented.

Theatre, too, has had its share of the finances of the fund. Perhaps the greatest achievement in this field is the restoration of the theatre in Tanta. Built in 1927, the Tanta theatre has played an important role as a centre for the dissemination of culture. Many drama troupes from Cairo have performed there. But, sharing the fate of so many buildings, the theatre went through a period of neglect and inactivity. The fund came to its rescue. It announced a competition for the best architectural design. Now, work will start at a cost of approximately LE4 million.

The fund has also evolved a publication programme. It has published a series of books, in both Arabic and English, about film production in Egypt. These books provide details of all the films that have been produced in Egypt and the series as a whole is a very useful reference work on the development of the cinema industry. The latest, and welcome, publication supported by the Fund is Silent Images: Women in Pharaonic Egypt by Zaki Hawas, which has been issued in English. The forward to this valuable book is by Mrs Suzanne Mubarak. The text is beautifully written. The illustrations of statuettes and mural paintings, together with the chronological table, the list of famous women in Ancient Egypt and the comprehensive bibliography all contribute to make this an impressive book indeed.

What the Cultural Development Fund is doing answers the often asked question "What is the State's role in Culture?". The reply is satisfying indeed.

Mursi Saad El-Din



Re-reading the medieval chronicles

Said Abdel-Fattah Ashour gives an overview of the crusading spirit, as evinced in the symposium organised by the Association of Arab Historiographers, held recently in Cairo

The Battle of Hittin, July 1187, where Saladin (depicted above) defeated the crusaders

"The Historical Framework of the Crusades" was the subject of a three-day seminar (28-30 November) held in Cairo by the Association of Arab Historiographers to mark the passage of nine centuries since Pope Urban II's proclamation of the Crusades in 1095. In my key-note address I highlighted the purpose of the seminar: to re-evaluate the lessons learnt from the Crusades. The projected benefit of the study of history is to learn from the mistakes of the past, the better to solve current problems and plan for a saner future. The inquiry into that era was thus to be conducted impartially, in an atmosphere of tolerance.

In the seven sessions of the seminar, 20 speakers came to the podium, addressing an audience of about 200 historians and scholars who participated in the discussions. The conferees came from different parts of the Arab world — Saudi Arabia, the Emirates, Kuwait, Syria, Morocco, to mention but a few of the countries represented. A number of European scholars were also present: Michel Ballard from France, Franco Cardini from Italy and Marcos Mel from Britain.

In his presentation, Professor Rafaat Abdel-Hamid stressed, through an analysis of historical texts, that Pope Urban II's proclamation in 1095 of a war against the Muslims was an emotive one that, while it immediately mobilised the multitudes (knights, bandits, the mob), fell on deaf royal ears. The kings, at first, detected in the call to crusade a ploy on the part of the papacy to consolidate its own political position in western Europe. The speaker endorsed his argument by pointing to the fact that no emperor or king from the kingdoms of western Europe took part in the First Crusade and that those monarchs who participated in subsequent Crusades did so, mostly, under papal pressure.

In his talk, Professor Abdalla Bin Abdalla Al-Rabi'i agreed with Abdel-Hamid's viewpoint: tackling the religious motives for the Crusades he discussed the testimonies of historians, both contemporary and modern. An important observation he made was that a large percentage of those who participated in the Crusades were Franks (i.e. Frenchmen) — which indicates that the religious spirit and the power of the papacy were much more marked in that particular region of western Europe. His view was shared by Professor Mohamed Mahmoud Ahmed Al-Nashar, the title of whose talk was "The Role of the Papacy and France in the Crusades".

As to Professor Ragab Mohamed Abdel-Halim, the focus of his talk was the role played by the countries of the western Mediterranean in the Crusades. Abdel-Halim further emphasised what some researchers had already advanced: that the Crusades began in Andalusia, moved towards the east and finally towards the eastern Mediterranean. Indeed, one of the participants endorsed Abdel-Halim's statement by analysing the chronology of the Crusades, arguing that the Andalusians and Moors early on resisted the crusading wave.

Nor did the participants in this seminar overlook the naval aspect of the struggle between the Islamic forces of the eastern Mediterranean and the crusader forces from western Europe. In his paper on the Islamic navy and its opposition to the crusaders in Egypt and the Levant, Professor Ibrahim Ibrahim El-Enani brought out the growing importance of Muslim naval bases in the Fatimid, Ayyubid and Mameluke periods. Realising that the sea route was a vital artery, linking crusader strongholds in the East with their countries of origin in the West, the fleets of Muslim countries launched several attacks on crusader ships to cut off the Frankish strongholds from supplies and reinforcements from western Europe.

Tracing the geographical presence of the crusaders in the Levant, it was only natural that the stronghold of Al-Raha, the first crusader outpost, should come under discussion. In a paper entitled "The Liberation of Al-Raha and its Impact on the Crusades", Professor Ibrahim Za'rour chronicled the history of this stronghold: its inception, the prominent role it played as the eastern headquarters of the crusader body and the detrimental effect of its conquest by Emadeddin Zanki on the crusaders in 1144.

But the Crusades did not end with the expulsion of the last crusaders from the Levant towards the end of the thirteenth century; rather the date heralded the end of one phase and the beginning of another. Professor Abdalla Abdel-Razeq Ibrahim, in his paper on Portuguese activities in the Maghreb in the second half of the sixteenth century, argued that the war between the Portuguese and the Muslims in North Africa were no less ferocious than those that took place between the crusaders and the Muslims in the east. Through careful analysis of documents and contemporary sources, the researcher traced the history of that confrontation.

Professor Shawqi Attalla Al-Gamal read a thought-provoking study on the role played by Spain in the crusader movement in the sixteenth century, after it had eradicated the last vestiges of Islam in Andalusia. The speaker analysed at length the religious motive, as represented by the papacy and the clergy, as well as the strong religious feelings that coloured the sentiments of the Spanish monarchs. On the other hand, the researcher did not overlook the imperialistic motive behind Spanish activity on the North African coast, thus shedding light on the roots of the modern colonial movement.

The echoes of the crusading spirit in the movement of geographical discoveries towards the beginning of the modern era was the subject of Farouk Osman Abaza's talk. The researcher marshalled historical evidence in his argument that the movement of geographical discoveries was not free of a crusading spirit, manifest in the attitudes of west Europeans whose aggression against Muslims in these regions was no less ferocious than that of the crusading movement in the east Mediterranean and North Africa.

There is no doubt that the Crusades left a military imprint on the eastern Mediterranean, evinced in the policy of building castles, fortresses and ramparts to protect these countries from the aggressors. Egypt, whose harbours were attacked, was no exception. Professor Kamel Moussa Abdou tackled military architecture and civil defence measures in Egypt in the era of the Crusades. The researcher outlined the works of the various rulers of Egypt, giving descriptions of castles, fortresses and bastions they constructed, based on archaeological evidence and contemporary accounts.

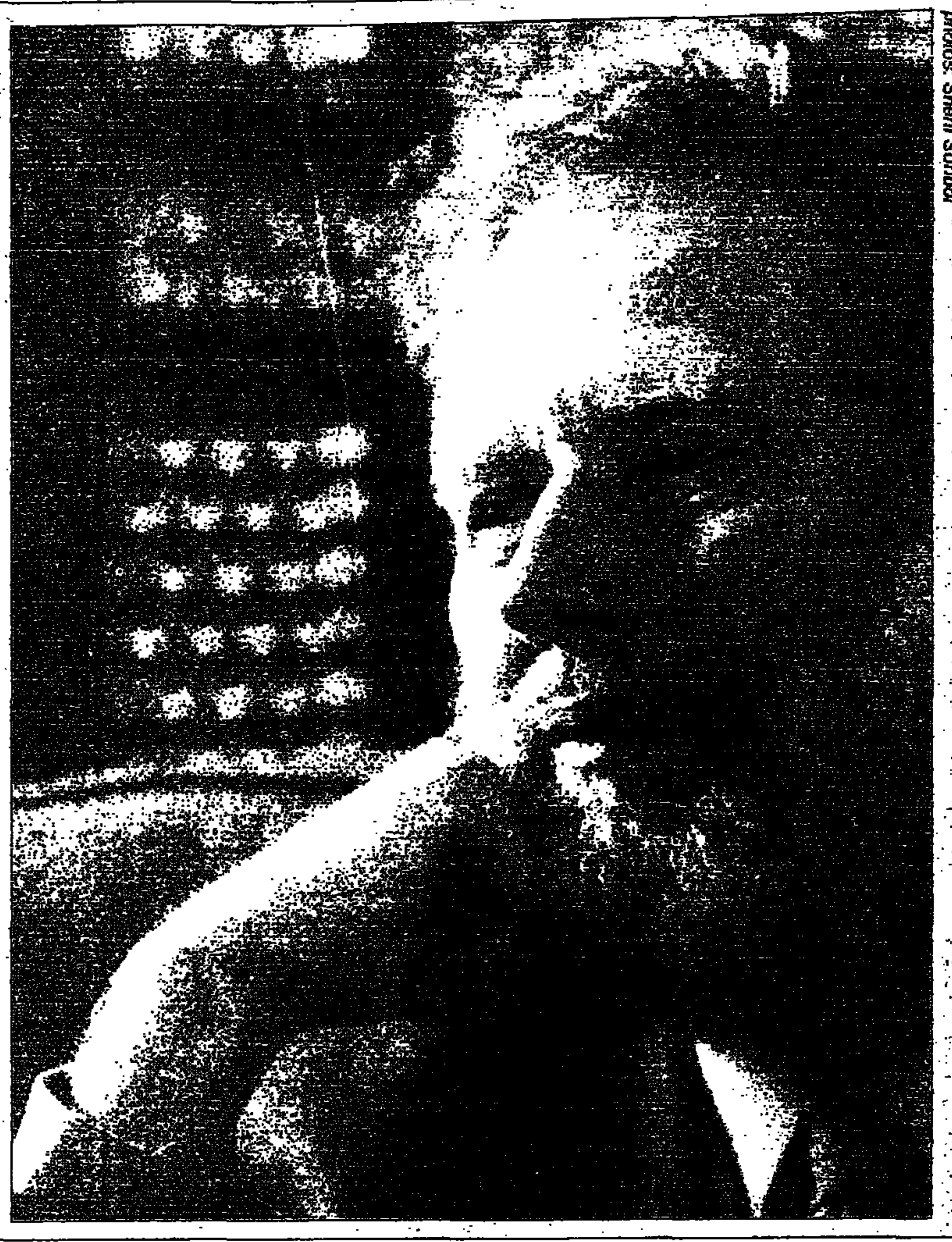
The varied functions of castles, fortresses and ramparts in the Crusades also came into focus in Professor Ali Mohamed Al-Ghamedi's paper, in which he took as a case study the castle of Beghrass. He persuasively argued the key military importance of Beghrass, located on the road between Antioch and Aleppo, at a time when the former was the major crusader stronghold in the north of the Levant while the latter represented a strong Muslim front. Furthermore, the castle, as he explained, was on a strategic location on the route linking Antioch with south-east Asia Minor.

Professor Franco Cardini's paper investigated the freedom and tolerance enjoyed by Christians in the Jerusalem of the fourteenth century, drawing on a contemporary account by a Florentine pilgrim. As for professor Michel Ballard's paper, it was on the art of military siege in the light of sources on the First Crusade.

The writer is head of the Association of Arab Historiographers.

Black Athena created a storm in the cloistered world of classics. Martin Bernal, in Cairo this week to discuss his controversial work, met with Anouar Abdel-Malek, whose work he cites as an important influence. Mona Anis and Nigel Ryan attended as the discussion ranged across the reception accorded to a project intended to "lessen European arrogance" to the emergence of culture, and attempts to maintain cultural specificities, as the determinant of power relations





photos: Sherif Sonbol

A case for coherence

Let us begin with your book, *Black Athena*, and its political purpose which is, according to your words in the introduction, "to lessen European cultural arrogance."

I had both a scholarly and a political motive in writing. The scholarly thing was to open doors for people better trained than me to go into. As an outsider I felt that I could really make things visible. The political message was to lessen European arrogance, which is not to attack European justifiable pride, though it does mean to question and challenge the idea that all good things came from Europe. And that is why I focused on Greece, because Greece is now seen as the origin of everything good that is in European culture. And these good things — democracy, fine art, philosophy, mathematics, science — all these good things are supposed to have originated in Greece. Therefore I wanted to see Greece as part of an Eastern Mediterranean context in which Egypt and the Levant really played the primary role.

I'm not saying everything good came from Egypt or that everything good came from Syro-Palestine but that it came from this very, very intense cultural mix which was extraordinary for Western history. Of course I'm leaving out East Asian history and American history. I'm really dealing with European, West Asian and North African history. The political motive is really to reduce the role of Europe but not to wipe it out.

How was this attempt of yours to lessen European arrogance received in Europe and the West in general?

Bernal: My project has two main aspects: one was historiographical — i.e. how the origins of Ancient Greece have been perceived by writers of history, starting off with the Greeks of the classical period, how they saw their origins, and going on through the Hellenistic, Roman, Early Christian, early Islamic and Medieval periods, examining how Greek culture was seen. That was really the topic of volume I which came out in 1987. At the same time the introduction outlined another project, which is to try to assess, as far as is possible, what actually happened at the time Greek culture was being formed. So I had both a historiographical and a historical project. Now the reaction to the historiographical project was, more or less, it's OK — it's a bit polemically written but the ideology involved in 19th and 20th century interpretations of Greece, by elevating Greece, making Greece mysteriously a projection of Northern Europe into the Mediterranean, all these things were admitted by most reviewers. On the other hand my historical project was treated with — more or less — distrust. The basic line was historiography OK, archaeology dubious, and the language part, because I'm arguing that some 40 per cent of the Greek vocabulary has Ancient Egyptian or semitic roots — that was the claim I set out and which I still believe — that was believed to be crazy. So it was approval, moderation in saying the archaeology was dubious, and then dismissal saying the language section was crazy. A wonderfully liberal response in many ways.

However, when volume II, which is concerned with archaeology, came out in 1991, the response was slightly more complicated. It ran pretty much as follows: Bernal's method is appalling, he is eclectic, he uses different sources, unreliable sources, trusts mythology too much, but on the other hand he may be right, he may well be right. There's a wonderful quote from the journal *Antiquities* which read: "Bernal has the alarming habit of being right for the wrong reasons." So you have this paradox: it is now conceded that the historiography, i.e. the forces behind the separation of Greece from the rest of the East Mediterranean, were largely caused by ideological reasons in the early 19th century. There is an admission that there were, in fact, very intense contacts between or among the three regions, Syro-Palestine, Egypt and the Aegean, during the Bronze Age, which is the formative period of Greek civilisation.

If we know that scholars were ideologically disinclined to see connections, or rejected all possibility of connections, and we know that these connections actually existed, and we also know that linguists who have been working very hard on the Greek language have been unable to explain half the vocabulary, why shouldn't we suggest that Greek culture and civilisation had sources in Ancient Egypt and the western Semitic world. I think in fact, by making the concessions they have already destroyed all their objections to my case.

Fairly early on, when I began to get a sense of the reaction to my work I set up a scheme for any serious challenge to it based on the sequence ignore, dismiss, attack, absorb. The stage of ignore proved much shorter than I imagined. I got attention much more quickly than I thought possible, which was great luck. The dismissal phase also didn't last as long as I thought it would. The attack phase is naturally lasting much longer but my surprise has really been that some classicists have actually been sympathetic. The majority have been antipathetic to my work. But there is a group, in classics as a field, that really likes what I'm doing. I mean they think I've made mistakes, they don't agree with every single aspect of it, but they think that I'm heading in the right direction.

You've also accused the whole classics discipline of being counter-revolutionary....

Bernal: This is very difficult for them to take because what I'm saying is that they're wrong intellectually, that their interpretation of Greek culture as a northern European culture is mistaken. But I'm also saying that the reason why they are mistaken is that their founders were racist and anti-semitic, that they didn't want Egyptians, whom they saw as partially African, and they didn't want the people of Syro-Palestine, whom they saw as Semites, to have formed the essence of European civilisation.

I'm not saying that classicists today are any more racist or anti-semitic than scholars in any other discipline in northern Europe and in North America. But I am saying their scholarly ancestors were. Their scholarly ancestors were pioneers of racism and anti-semitism.

This is not to say, however, that everybody in the field of classics was hostile to my work. Last term I gave three lectures which were quite well attended, though at one stage I began to worry that I had become very tame when a leading classicist dozed off during my lecture. Generally they've been polite and cordial. And this is partly because the political atmosphere is changing. I was surprised to find allies within the field of classics, which was a mistake in my sociology of knowledge. I had made classics much more monolithic than it turned out to be. There are all sorts of schisms within it, some of them so fundamental that they will actually try and blow up the whole system. They are so disgruntled with the whole thing, particularly women within classics.

Professor Abdel-Malek could you perhaps speak about the relevance of *Black Athena* in the Egyptian and Afro-Asian context?

Abdel-Malek: What I would like to address first is the dialectics of how the book was received more positively than you expected in certain quarters.



'It is a European genius to make European what was extra European. This is what they have done to Christianity. It was known that Christ lived in Palestine but they somehow shifted the centre to Rome'

The historical moment in which the book was conceived and produced is very important here. In the introduction you mention how you moved away from China to this area for political reasons. In fact, the major challenge to Western European dominance or hegemony has been and will be Asia, that is essentially China. This is something you lived through and I also lived through, the Bandung thing. However, once China was established it could not be challenged. Nobody in his right mind would think that China could waver from its chosen course. This is due to its density, the Long March, contradictions, and hundreds of other things. So you moved from this area to an area that you believed to be more vulnerable. Is not that what you said in the introduction to the book?

You moved to the area which was in flux, which you defined as east of the Mediterranean and which I would define as North Africa, South West Asia — the outer circle of the Orient. Now, because you were dealing with this you had to expect that you would be well received by what I would call — quote and unquote — realists, that is the realist section of the political class in the West, which is intelligent enough, especially in Europe, to see the relative decline of Europe, as compared to Asia, in what I call historical intiative. They have become more vulnerable to what the Middle East signifies in terms of resources and ill-perceived menaces (there are no real menaces, there is only the question of resources which are controllable or non-controllable). My own experience in Europe tells me that a large section of the European elite is today conversant with the ideas of Spengler and Toynbee. And your book came at this moment, when Europe was beginning to pose questions to itself: We are no longer the centre, so who is? Your message was that, yes, we are not the centre, because there were other centres that informed our formation. This is why the growing acceptance of your thesis should not surprise you. In fact, I am surprised that you are surprised, because I can see very clearly the need for your book. Europeans may not accept a hypothesis like yours coming from an Oriental, but they will take it from you.

The second point I want to make relates also to the historical moment of the publication of your work and why it looked staggering in the South. In our country the paradigm of progress and of modernism and of the so called secular society and what they call civil society postulates that things start from Europe. But you tell them that you were there before. You will run into a mine field. Our faculties of arts have departments of classics teaching Greek and Latin. In the past I wrote a lot about the fact that the term classics in Egypt must denote Egyptian studies, Egyptology, about which a lot of Egyptians know nothing much. But classics in its exclusively European usage is deemed to be the means to enter progress.

To reiterate, the historical moment was very favourable, though it did not look like that scientifically. Politically, however, it was very favourable. It is a moment in which works like Needham's on China, and your own work, can be accommodated. Your work is essentially a work on the politics of culture.

Bernal: You do make things clear for me regarding the European reception of the book, Anouar. In the light of what you have said your surprise at my surprise seems justified. However, in America there is another factor, which is the whole multi-culturalism debate which led people on the liberal left side to say, Oh good, Greece was a multi-cultural society. America can do the same. But there will be even more people who will say rubbish, there has been no successful multi-cultural society. So cultural morés in the US have provided me with a degree of support, which is significant in the academic world, but which also provides me with lots of enemies. A whole book is being compiled of the harshest criticisms of my work. I am almost certain that this project is being funded by a thing called the National Association of Scholars, which is one of America's right-wing think-tanks.

There is really passion and money behind the opposition to my work in America, but there is also support, because these are live issues.

The one thing I had not reckoned with was the disappearance of European communism in 1989. I had not anticipated this, nor its immediate effect in America, as the right-wing began to cast around for enemies to keep society in the state of tension that had profited them so well for so long. Afrocentrism and political correctness have been built up as the huge bogeys that are supposed to threaten white intellectuals. And *Black Athena* became the centre of this whirlpool in a way that I do not think it would have been if anticommunism had still been a source of enmity.

Abdel-Malek: When I spoke about the historical moment when you conceived your book, I spoke about Europe not the West. The collapse of the bi-polar system and the abrupt end of communism in Europe was accompanied by the unleashing of a new-right hegemonic campaign in the States. At this moment things which were bearable 20 years ago, like Edward Said's *Orientalism*, the space allowed to new left circles here and there, all these things became unacceptable in the US. There is no space allowed now to anything that can challenge the hegemony of the centre. They do not even accept the idea of European union. So you face a very changed situation in the US. Europe can see things better, even if slowly. They have spotted China as a partner. France and Italy are seeking South connections, but the US is different. Europe will get more and more tolerant of your book and at the same time the resistance in the US will harden.

Your work is a work which challenges the centrality of Western thought in the history of mankind: Why have they been so reluctant to accept the Egypt dimension in the formation of Greek thought? What you are saying in your book is that the West was not at the centre of things. The thought content, the notion that ideas came from somewhere else, if you add to these the fact that the three monotheisms happened to obtain in the direct circle of the old Pharaonic empire, it all becomes very annoying.

Everything which came from the non-European centre has been dismissed. I am convinced that a very large portion of what we call European thought, especially in metaphysics and ethics, came from Egypt. And your work is bridgebuilding in this respect. This may be accepted in Europe, but it will not be accepted in America, much as they cannot accept that the next century will be the century of the Asian Pacific.

Could we speak about the formative influences behind your work and your earlier career as a Sinologist?

Bernal: First I had a broad background in world history from my father who spent six years reading to me. So there was a sense of the world as a whole and the possibility of comprehending it, which my father saw very clearly and which to a large extent I absorbed. I also absorbed a sense of what my mother would call underdoggerry, that is support for the oppressed and minorities. So these two backgrounds really come from both of my parents. My father, of course, was a scientist who believed that things had rational solutions to an extent that I now cannot accept, but I think that that sense of the Enlightenment in its pure form has lasted with me, that I am a modernist and not a post-modernist despite my knowledge of everything that is confusing and distressing in the present world.

My father was a close friend of Joseph Needham, and he would take me to see Joseph Needham as he was writing his great works, and Needham was very precious with his time. He would say, I can give you six minutes at 4.15, and we would have tea and they would be a charming six minutes, but then he would go back to work. He had a gigantic task at hand. He lived into his 90s and did almost complete what he wanted to do.

Needham is the second great influence on me. He started off as a scientist, a bio-chemist and an embryologist, but was always far broader than that. There was a whole generation of scientists of the 1920s and 1930s who were humanists as well, and far more subtle than modern scientists, who have depth but lack breadth. Anyhow, Needham, as well as well as being a superb scientist also read very interestingly on the history of science. Very early, I think in the late 1920s, he wrote a history of embryology and linked that to artistic styles: Embryology and the rococo was one of many themes that interested him. At the same time he wrote a history of 17th century England, but he wrote it under a pseudonym because he felt that his scientific colleagues would not take him seriously if he was seen to be absorbed in other fields. Then in 1931 there was a great conference on the history of science and it was attended by a Soviet delegation who gave papers on social influences on Newton, things like that, which really excited broad scientists like my father and Needham. My father's work on the sociology of science and the history of sciences started coming out in the 1930s and was not completed until the early 1950s, after which he continued to deal with the social context of science. A lot of that still survives in my own work, inasmuch as I want to examine the social context of scholarship.

Did you know that your father's book *The Social Function of Science* was translated into Arabic, in Egypt, as early as 1949?

Bernal: I heard that from Professor Fatma Moussa when she was introducing me in the meeting at the Higher Council for Culture, and I was very touched. *The Social Function of Science* was the first book on the sociology of science. Robert Myrton, who is now considered to be the father of sociology of science, had my father's books on his shelves. He recommended them to students of his, though he very rarely cited my father which, I think, was essentially for political fiat. He was writing in the early 1950s and he could not quote a notorious Marxist, though he took a great deal of his scientific analysis regarding the structure of science as an organisation from my father.

But to go back to Needham. He got interested in China by meeting Chinese students and being impressed by their extraordinary high quality. He leapt at the chance, during the Second World War, to be a scientific liaison with the British Embassy in nationalist China. He travelled widely in non-occupied China, the China that was not occupied by the Japanese, and so got a feel for Chinese civilisation and science and technology from direct experience. Then he came back to Cambridge and continued his scientific work, but managed to persuade Cambridge University Press to support his



project in writing the history of Chinese science. I do not think they knew how gigantic the project was going to be, but they took it on. Then he got into trouble because he was invited by the North Korean government during the Korean war to examine their allegations of germ-warfare. He was the one scientific expert who really, at the time, accepted the allegations were true which, at that time in the West, was *unthinkable*. No one wanted to believe the Americans could be using germ-warfare. And this did put the whole credibility of Needham's work in doubt, and there were pressures to try and get him out of the university. Of course, from what we know now, he was almost certainly right, though at the time it had a devastating effect on his career. He had two posts, one in the university, one in college. In a way you can say that the university represents bourgeois bureaucracy, while the college is still largely a feudal institution, and so Needham was protected by the feudalism of the institution. He stayed on in the college, even though work in the university became more difficult. But that in a way suited him better because his project was moving more and more into the history of science and away from science itself. So he worked in the college and rose within the college system until he became first president and then master of the college. He was anomalous because he was very radical and at the same time extremely religious and he also loved ceremonial. He loved dressing up, so the feudalism suited him. He was a radical and a Marxist, but he was never a materialist in the way my father was or in the way other scientists of their generation were. He was a Christian and a Taoist at the same time. Taken to see Needham ever since I was young, I was impressed by him, his work, and also by China. And this is what lead me to take Chinese studies at Cambridge.

That was 1957, but before that I did two years of national service, and there is a story to tell here in Egypt, because my two years of national service coincided with the the Suez War, or the tripartite aggression on Egypt. I was in the air force, and I was in real agony as to what would happen if I was posted to Suez. Would I refuse, in which case I would face up to 20 years in prison, and was I prepared for that. This was something that was very much preoccupying me at that time. Of course, at the same time, and when I was in civilian clothes, I was demonstrating in Trafalgar Square and in Downing Street against the war.

Could you tell us more about that...

We marched to Downing Street. Some police agents led the group away from Downing Street up Regent Street because we almost made our way through the barricades when Eden and Guy Moullet were debating the war. Anyhow, I did my two years of national service, and luckily I was not posted to Suez, because they probably knew about me and my father and they obviously thought it was not a good idea.

After completing national service, I went to Cambridge in *1957* to study Chinese, and in *1959-1960* I went to Peking for eight months as part of my undergraduate studies. So I was in China during the Great Leap Forward, and it was an extremely difficult period in China, and I must say I got disillusioned by China at that point. Up to that point China had seemed to me to be the ideal compromise between Stalinism and capitalism. It was politically a third road. After that I settled down to academic work on Chinese, but at that stage I had two academic models in mind. One, my father, was a polymath and would take anything with a global vision, the other, my grandfather, Alan Gardiner, who I then saw as a narrow scholar, somebody who is deep and narrow, who knew middle Egyptian and Egyptian grammar but did not have the breadth of my father. At that stage I could not challenge my father in his breadth, so I settled to be a narrow scholar. What I did not realise until relatively recently was that my grandfather had greater breadth than I supposed and that he was one of the first people to introduce Saussure's linguistics into England. So in his linguistics he was quite innovative and now the French are translating his work. This would please him, because he was proud of his Egyptological work, but he was prouder still of his linguistic work, so I think to be recognised by both sides would have pleased him. But he never knew, because during his life his linguistic writings were considered lightweight and unimportant by the philosophers of linguistics, and that was partly because he was an Egyptologist. How could somebody from such an obscure and low status discipline have anything to say about linguistics and philosophy. That *shows us the status of Egyptology* in the British universities.

Anyhow, I was working on China, until in the 1970s I had this mid-life crisis. What was I going to do with the rest of my life? The Chinese field was changing from a field with few Western scholars into a very technical field with a mass of secondary literature. Also I became involved in the *anti*-war protest against the American war in Indo-China, and for that I had to learn Vietnamese, which I did. The one Vietnamese expert in England said he would not debate with people who did not know Vietnamese, and as he was the only person in England who knew Vietnamese, I had to learn Vietnamese to challenge him. And it was *at that* period that I became fascinated with Vietnamese culture.

Did you go to Vietnam during the war?

Bernal: Yes. I went twice during the war, to North Vietnam as well as South Vietnam, and I saw what was going on. In 1974-75 I realised that the war was coming to an end, and also that the Cultural Revolution was coming to an end and that China was going to settle down in the way that it has done since 1976. And I felt that the Eastern Mediterranean had become a greater centre of tension and movement and that I should really think about that. And I got distracted by the ancient history. I have always been fascinated by ancient history, as my father was, and also because of my grandfather, who gave me the first copy of his Egyptian Grammar, with the warning — do not study Egyptian until you know Greek well enough. And I never knew Greek enough to satisfy him, so I did not really learn any Egyptian at that stage, but it was always there. In 1974 I started working on the relationship between Phoenician and Greek, that was how I began initially. Then *realising how little* of the Greek vocabulary could be explained in terms of Indo-European languages I moved to study Hebrew and realised that there were many similarities between Greek and Hebrew. But all the same there were *many* words of non Indo-European that I could not explain in terms of Semitic, and initially I thought, maybe this is the pre-Hellenic substratum that conventional wisdom supposes. Perhaps it is Hurrian, another South West Asian language, but I had to find out how that language looked. When I *eventually found out* it did not resemble anything like I was looking for, so I came to the conclusion that this was obviously not the answer. It was then that I looked at an etymological dictionary of Coptic, and I got some sense of how some late Egyptian looked, because late Egyptian is very early by Greek *standards*, and I *suddenly* realised *that* this was the missing portion, the portion I could not explain. So I was very heady for a month or two as words kept popping out. Then I had the other problem — why had I failed to see this before? The Greeks talk about Egypt all the time, so what was the taboo that was blocking me?

It is for this reason that I started on the historiographical work, looking at how Europeans have portrayed the origins of Ancient Greece. So in a way the work I came to last was the work that was included in volume one of *Black Athena*. Thus the book is in reverse order. Realising the ideological forces behind my inability to see the obvious, I then came to the model from my previous work on Japan and China. Japanese culture is distinctive, the Japanese language is not like the Chinese language, but on the other hand Japanese culture and Japanese language is *saturated* by China and Korea and one cannot begin to understand Japan without being aware of precedents in China and Korea. But that was precisely what the Hellenists and classicists have been doing with their Japan, which is Greece. They tried to understand it without using the needed reference. Why did they fail to do this? That is what I looked at historiographically.



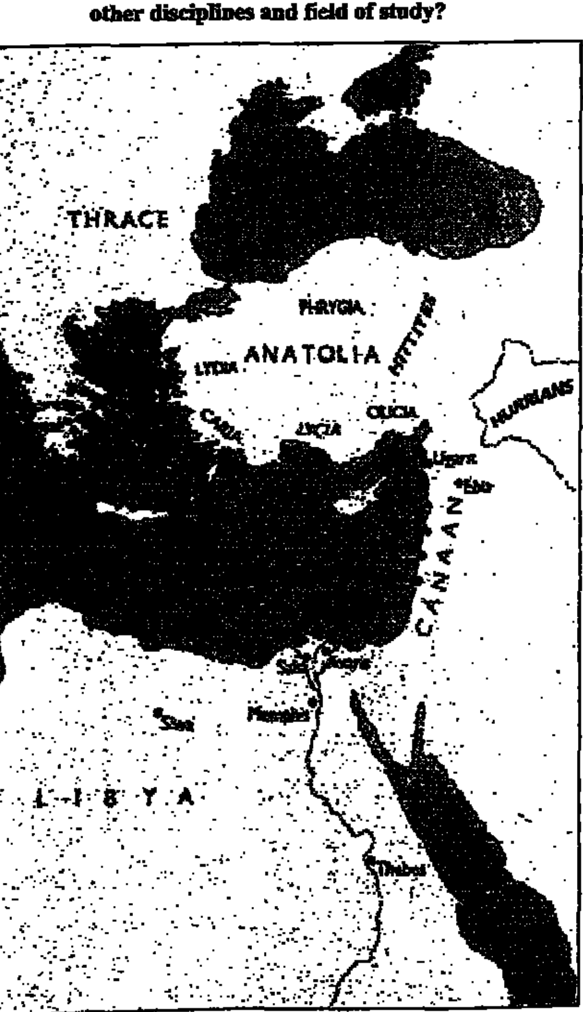
Above, anti-Suez demonstrations and right, Bernal and Anouar Abdel-Malek

'My two years of national service coincided with the the Suez War. I was in real agony as to what would happen if I was posted to Suez. Would I refuse, in which case I would face prison? Of course, at the same time, and when I was in civilian clothes, I was demonstrating in Trafalgar Square and in Downing Street against the war'



Valley of the Kings, 1922: Far right, Bernal's grandfather, Alan Gardiner, seated next to Howard Carter, lunches in a tomb. "During Gardiner's life his linguistic writings were considered lightweight and unimportant by the philosophers of linguistics, and that was partly because he was an Egyptologist. How could somebody from such an obscure and low status discipline have anything to say about linguistics and philosophy? That shows us the status of Egyptology in the British universities"

Can we talk also about wider influences from other disciplines and field of study?



Bernal: There are two things that I would like to mention in this context. First, there was the influence of Anouar Abdel-Malek, whom I knew long before, when I was working on China. He has always been interested in China and was also close to Needham. So his way of looking at intercontinental cultures, and his insistence that Europe is not the obvious centre, and that Africa and Asia can relate to each other on their own, as well as thinking in very large blocks over long periods of time, these ideas contributed greatly to my way of thinking. The second influence is Edward Said's emphasis on projection, that is how Christian Europe has projected its own fears about itself onto Islam and the East. I approach things in a more prosaic way, though it was wonderful to have a work like Said's, as well as having Said himself as a heroic figure. To keep working in such tensions, to be what he is in the middle of New York, is extraordinary. That model was important to me.

The other contact I made was with African and African-American scholars, as my work introduced me to African-American intellectuals who never accepted the Aryan model. African-Americans and white abolitionists stayed with the ancient model and the acceptance of the centrality of Egyptian culture to Greece, so it was fascinating to meet these people. And then finding that other people held these views before me. DuBois is very articulate and scholarly in setting this out. Also the work of Cheikh Anta Diop, though I do not go all the way with him, really opened a number of very important doors for me.

How did Afro-American scholars respond to your thesis and the way your book was received?

Bernal: There was a mixture of responses. I have been attacked by some African Americans as I was seen as part of a subtle Jewish plot. That half of the book is about anti-semitism and the role of anti-semitism in the dismissal of the Phoenicians is an interesting topic that I certainly deal with, exactly because it is interesting. The other more fundamental criticism is — why does Bernal get all this attention while blacks have been writing for decades and they have not been taken seriously? I think part of the answer stems from outright racism, as many would not listen to anything in a black accent or from a black face. They say they have a special axe to grind, they cannot be trusted. So when I came, white, with all the status cards in my hand, that is white, male, middle class, middle-aged, and — this is additional in America — I am British, I had the voice of objectivity, a voice which is particularly effective with classicists and people in traditional disciplines. The indirect way in which racism has affected me is that I was able to get a post in a top university with a lighter teaching load that gave me the time to do my work, with a very good library accessible. I was also able to find a publisher who produced the book very well indeed. So the original edition of the book is physically attractive, printed on beautiful paper, with good type and relatively few typos, which is very unlike the work of most of the African-American authors. This is very messy because they did not have the facilities I had, so their work is full of typos and misprints. If my manuscript was typed straight it would have *looked* as messy as the works of African-Americans. All the facilities I was accorded are part of my privileged position On the other hand, I think what I am doing is useful and I am going to continue with i.t

Can we stop for a moment at this alleged Jewish plot you mentioned. Obviously you understand the fears of many people here in Egypt, and in the Arab world in general, of a Jewish plot to appropriate the history of the region and make anything that is distinguished an exclusively Jewish property, including ancient Egyptian achievements. Many Egyptians remember Begin's remark when he first came to Egypt and said that he was happy to see the pyramids which were built by his ancestors. So can we speak briefly about your position vis-à-vis Israel, especially in the light of one quotation in your introduction which I understand to be an objection to Israel's use of military might, and an acknowledgement of the racism behind the project of the establishment of the state of Israel, but which was also quoted in some Arab publications as a sign of your strong pro-Israeli sympathies:

"Since 1949 the Jews — or at least the Israelis_ have been increasingly accepted as full Europeans, and it has become quite clear that speaking a Semitic language does not disqualify people from military achievement"

Bernal: The term Semitic is a linguistic term and not an ethnic or racial term. It basically means people who speak Semitic languages and these include both Arabic and Hebrew. There is no doubt technically that Semite means someone who speaks a Semitic language. I feel two ways about the quote you are reading from my book. In one way I feel it is of some asset that Jews have restored a sense of self-confidence. On the other hand I feel that the cost of this has been too high, that the turning of Jews from victims into oppressors is something bad, for Jews perhaps, though certainly it is worse for Arabs. During the Vietnam war there were people who said: I do not mind what is happening in Vietnam, what is so terrible about the Vietnam war is what it is doing to us Americans. And that seems such a ridiculous inversion. It is the people who are being oppressed that are really suffering, even though the people who are oppressing may feel discomfort or even anguish over their role as oppressors. So I think it is an unhealthy situation all round and this is really what I meant. But I do think the effect historigraphically was the one I said, that it allowed the Phoenicians back into the European world, just as Christianity is somehow made European. So you make a little pocket of Palestine and you say, for the time being, this is Europe.

Can we move now and *speak about* the respective positions of both yourself and Professor Abdel-Malek vis-à-vis the debate on culture, ranging from multiculturalism and hybridity, on one side, to the supremacy of cultures, or more specifically civilisations, on the other?

Abdel-Malek: There is something quite important here regardless of the superficial or sentimental treatment of specific moments of cultural encounters. In the 1940s and 1950s the cultural factor_ was not a formative factor in the game of power in the world. The Marxian tradition emphasised the economic factor, and the liberal tradition also emphasised *the same factor. Both the legacy of Adam* Smith and Marx was economistic.

What is happening today is that it is culture that is at the centre. Culture is having centre place in the problem of the emerging new world (and this is not to be confused with the new world order). Culture, I repeat, occupies a central role in the shaping of the new world, not from the point of view of clash or non-clash of civilisations, but because of the globalisation of the world which, after the collapse of the bi-polar world system, is provoking in all meaningful units of analysis and action — nations and *geo-cultural areas* — a protracted *will to maintain* their specificities. I emphasise here to maintain, not to invent, as some claim. Maintainance and development of one's cultural specificity is the real issue and hence the clash. This is why culture is so important these days. Of course some of the expressions of this may take hilarious forms, especially with some sub-ethnic groups. Yet, in the major centres culture is playing a very important role. For example: the analysis of the present crisis in France was carried out in economistic terms. This is wrong, what is happening now in France is largely a response of the masses of the French nation to Maastricht, as a counter part to globalisation. The French want to remain French. And they are furious that the French nationalists, the Gaullists, are forcing them not to be so. This is a hailarious situation, but this is what it is in fact.

Thus the problem is not at all simple in the way it is evoked by superficial analysts. It is much deeper *than that. All of a sudden we are witnessing the* emergence of culture as the central factor. As a matter of fact culture has always been a central factor in world dialectics, but this fact was eclipsed for some time by the rise of the bourgeois state to hegemony and the challenge to that hegemony by socialism. It was during this period that economism became *prevalent. Of course economy is very important but* it is not the only thing.

Bernal: My position is in the middle. I do not accept the primordialist notion — that cultures have always existed and will go on growing on their own terms — because I see hybridity as something very important. In a way I see a struggle between two models — the model of roots and the model of .rhizomes. This is something that comes up in Caribbean identity. Aime Cesire and others said that Caribbean culture is a transplant from an African tree. But younger critics refuse the tree model for Caribbean culture. It is too diverse and has other sources, so that it is more accurate to speak of a mangrove swamp of rhizomes. Mangrove swamps have roots that cannot be distinguished from branches. I think that some cultures and some periods are so confusing in terms of mix that you cannot use the tree model.

On the other hand this raises one of the issues that I see in post modernism — i.e. accuracy vs coherence. Post modernism is obsessed with accuracy. You cannot use large categories, you have to think dynamically. Any individual has multiple identities. This is usually true. People and cultures are extraordinarily complicated but, on the other hand, the only accurate representation of reality is reality itself, and that does not get us anywhere. So you have to reduce and simplify. For some periods you have to give up on the tree, while there are others for which it is useful. Cultures have multiple roots going in them, they form coherent units for a while, and then they branch out and join with other trees.

If you look at a culture like that of ancient Egypt, its formative period was one of mixture. You have a movement from the south of the Nile, from the west, across the Sahara and a movement from the north and east. It is a very mixed position. On the other hand it fuses and you get a coherence that lasts over a very long period of time. There is a consistency throughout the dynastic period and common era. It is at this point that you can safely use the tree model to look at a culture.

What about the distinction between civilisations and cultures? Maybe, in view of the compromise you are suggesting, Professor Bernal, you would accept such distinctions as suggested by Huntington, without necessarily agreeing with the conclusions Huntington reaches about the clash of civilisations?

Bernal: I would hate to be connected to Huntington in any way. But I think there is something in this distinction. I suppose it is like my tree and mangrove swamps. Cultures move, but then some are fixed over a relatively long time. However impervious to outside influences, their own tradition is more forceful and dominant.

As an expert on China why do you think that Confucianism is turned in Huntington's thesis into a menace to Western civilisation?

Bernal: His use of Confucianism is a technical error. I think that Taoism is more important. If you look at Mao Tse Tong's thought ,Taoism is more important than Confucianism. Huntington's project of claiming civilisations to be solid is difficult. The difficulty with the world is that America is so powerful that its fantasies or misconceptions of the world have a greater reality. And in a way you can say that both Ireland and Israel are American fantasies, they are projections of American sectional fantasies. But one has to take what the state department thinks seriously, since they can impose their view on what is happening. Sometimes it is too fantastic, like let us end all history. Huntington, though, is not fantastic. I think that the demise of communism, which is seen as permanent, left a need for a new enemy and Islam provided a convenient enemy, while during the Cold War it had to be courted. So it would seem to me like an obvious enemy, one that they can be more open about than the hideous message which is anti-colour. There is a large black population in America, where the Muslim population is small and until recently extraordinarily assimilationist. They are not frightened about pressure groups from Islam. I also think that Israel and the Jewish lobby has fed into this. Here is an instance of a reinvention of the tradition. But you can go back to the crusades and say this is a perpetual battle of civilisations only by picking up a certain conflict and ignoring many other instances, combinations and particular relations — Britain sending guns to Morocco to fight the Spaniards, say.

Is this the tip of the iceberg of a new, emerging racism?

Bernal: The end of the bipolar world has produced a situation in which America feels that it no longer needs to restrain its racism. It was the Cold War, the need to appear to be consistently liberal, that brought about the Supreme Court decision. It is very interesting that it is only since the fall of the Soviet Union that the chain gang has been restored, as it has been in the state of Alabama. There are various things that America is no longer frightened to do because there is not going to be a Soviet propaganda blitz. You can imagine what the Soviets would have done with the introduction of the chain gang.

Charles Murray's book on race is a reflection of this atmosphere, providing statistics to show that blacks' IQs are systematically lower than those of whites and East Asians. This general stress on genetics, the genom project, is essentially to avoid social change and to discount social pressures .They are now beginning to panic about it, and so they did this thing of aquitting OJ to a general black rejoicing. I do not know if they proved he did it, but everybody thought he did. But I think that blacks feel that the race has begun, and some are for just retreating into black communities and forgetting about integration, and this I think is largely the result of the end of the bi-polar system. There are no countervailing forces . What I see, and here I differ from Abdel-Malek, is that there will be an alliance between America, Europe and East Asia, and the necessary other is Islam and Africa. South Asia is up for grabs at the moment, but this alliance needs an enemy, otherwise it is not an alliance. Therefore you have to have backward people, people who are not part of the successful capitalist world.

The essence of things

The revival of traditional Islamic crafts has aroused new interest in recent years. But how should they be revived? **Rania Khallaf** seeks answers at the first International Festival of Traditional Islamic Architecture and Crafts and discusses the future of *mashrabiya* works

A festival for the revival of traditional Islamic crafts, the first international event of its kind to be held in Egypt, organised jointly by the Research Centre for Islamic History, Art and Culture in Istanbul (IRCICA) and the Egyptian Ministry of Culture, and co-sponsored by the Middle East Broadcasting Centre in London, concluded last week at the Cairo Opera House. Over 100 scholars of Islamic architecture from 32 countries participated in the seminar and other events.

Widespread neglect of Islam's rich artistic heritage, noted Ihsan Oghli, director of IRCICA, "is due *partly to our own neglect in the projection of* our heritage." The seminar held in the framework of the festival, he said, is the culmination of a long series of meetings aimed at laying down a plan for the economic, social and cultural development of traditional crafts among the members of the Organisation of the Islamic Conference (OIC). The seminar, which focused on the revival of *mashrabiya* (wood lattice-work) and stucco work inlaid with stained glass, was held in Egypt, which boasts arguably the most beautiful examples of *mashrabiya* from the Mamluke and Ottoman periods, Oghli added. "Our task in the IRCICA is to create awareness among official organisations and individuals alike of the importance of reviving and developing traditional Islamic architecture."

The revival of *mashrabiya* was one of the main topics discussed during the seminar. Professor Turgut Cansevar from Turkey emphasised that *mashrabiya* reflects the essence of Islam in its drive to combine the static with the dynamic, the spiritual with the material. Many experts believe that the art of *mashrabiya* was first elaborated in Egypt. Dr *Fahmi Abdel-Alim, an expert in Islamic architecture*, notes that Egypt was always famous for its wood-turning work, the expertise of its artisans passed on since ancient Greek times. The Caliph Omar Ibn Al-Khattab is said to have initiated rulers' patronage of *mashrabiya* work when he ordered Amr Ibn Al-Aas, the governor of Egypt, to raise the windows of houses to a level which would prevent outsiders from seeing in. This was to apply to buildings of more than one storey in Al-Fustat.

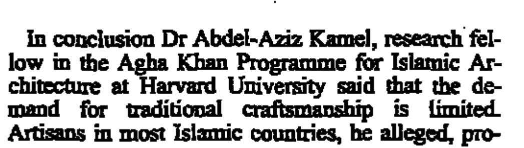
The craft continued during the Fatimid era. The best-known *mashrabiya* masterpiece dating back to the late Fatimid era are the three prayer niches kept in the Islamic Museum. The oldest of these belonged to Al-Azhar. "There are also Coptic masterpieces *from the Fatimid era including* a wooden door in the Abu Sayfayn Church in Old Cairo. The door is engraved with figures of monks against a background of branches and animal figures," says Dr Sawsan Amer, professor at Helwan University's Faculty of Education. Wood engraving was promoted with Ibn Tulun's arrival in Cairo: in his era, art styles that flourished in Samarra, Iraq were borrowed and elaborated upon by Egyptians. From the Ayyubid era, the coffin of Al-Imam Al-Shafi'i remains: a rectangular container with a pyramidal top, its sides are made of wood engraved with delicate plant figures set in star-shaped plates, geometric figures running across in finely etched parallel lines. The coffin is richly decorated with *Naskh* and *Kufic* calligraphy. Several other *mashrabiya* works can still be found in Old Cairo. In the heart of Islamic Cairo, too, they continue to decorate the facades of old buildings. Some overlook the inner courtyard, as in the Kridilya and El-Suhaymi houses (built in 1636 and 1648 respectively), and the recently restored El-Harawi house.

Mashrabiya flourished and became widespread in Muslim countries throughout the Mamluke and Ottoman period; it began to be neglected by the ruling class only in the eighteenth century, with the growing popularity of European architecture, which stressed the use of sandstone and turned away from the traditional Mediterranean house, oriented towards the inner court. "Later, with the developing of building materials, the introduction of cement and aluminum and the change in aesthetic and architectural values, *mashrabiya* was wiped out," says Fayqa Uwayda, a Lebanese scholar. *Mashrabvia's* most important function was to ensure privacy, making it possible to observe the outside world without being seen, says Turgut Cansever, professor of architecture at Istanbul University. In the Ottoman house, the windows on the outside walls were covered with lattice-work.

The introduction of Islam to South-East Asia did not disrupt traditional architectural forms: the distinct mosque type that emerged in the fourteenth century did not follow Arab or Indian examples, according to Dr Othman Yatim, associate professor at *Sarawak University in Malaysia, but developed on* the basis of local building traditions, with the adaptation of construction techniques to religious requirements. *Mashrabiya* and stucco inlaid with stained glass were not used until the Melka-style mosque developed. Neither *mashrabiya* nor stucco inlaid with stained glass are common in Bangladesh. Yet similar elements are used for the same purpose, according to Mushafique Kamal, vice-chairman of the Karika Association. For this reason, she says, there is potential for the development of a local form of *mashrabiya*. The Bangladeshi version of *mashrabiya*, known as "*jail*" (literally, perforated screen), is made of wood or perforated bricks or cement. Plaster is used only for small screens, *particularly on openings placed high on the* wall to allow warm air to escape. The social and environmental context of most Muslim countries, adds Kamal, is a strong incentive for the development of *mashrabiya*.

In other countries once renowned for their fine *mashrabiya* work, examples of the crafts are deteriorating rapidly. In Sanaa, Yemen old houses are rented out and the lattice-work is not properly maintained.







photos: Antoune Albert

In conclusion Dr Abdel-Aziz Kamel, research fellow in the Agha Khan Programme for Islamic Architecture at Harvard University said that the demand for traditional craftsmanship is limited. Artisans in most Islamic countries, he alleged, produce works taken from an old way of life which do not necessarily suit today's world. If designs are developed in such a way as to accommodate modern day requirements, argued Kamel, antiquarianism may be superseded.

Bumper to bumper

Rush hour? what rush hour? **Naglaa Saqr** runs for the bus

A million cars roll over Cairo's asphalt every day. One hundred thousand people commute from outside the capital, 20,000 service taxis ply the routes ignored by public means of transportation, tickets are slapped on 995 cars a day, and the agonising prospect of gridlock — the whole city grinding to a sudden, complete halt — seems to loom closer on the smoggy horizon every moment. The site for the second stage of the underground metro line, linking Shubra Al-Kheima to Giza, has cut out four-fifths of Tahrir Square, the hub of the downtown area; and the final section of Sixth of October Bridge, linking Ghamra to the Autostrade and aiming to decongest Abbassiya by offering the direct access to Al-Khalifa Al-Ma'mun, Urouba and Al-Nasr streets, is still under construction. Traffic lights are operated manually, inviting disregard and imposing an arbitrary flow of traffic which is, to say the very least, frustrating. Most people have experienced the sickening sway, reminiscent of ships on a frisky ocean, *of apparently stable fly-overs groaning under the* weight of the 900 buses which rumble over them everyday; 589 fines a month are registered against the department of public transport. Yet solutions are in the works which just might relieve the chronic traffic problems, which seem to have grown worse during the past year.

"The Cairo governor is thinking of a tunnel to link the Azhar bridge to Salah Salem Street. Prohibiting trucks and lorries from passing through the streets of Cairo is also a must. They should be restricted to the ring road. This will reduce the number of cars on the street by 30 per cent," says General Mohamed Youssef, the under-secretary at the Cairo Governorate.

"Traffic lights should be automatic. A camera should be placed every 100 meters, giving the operations room of the traffic department a direct view of all roads in Cairo," says Dr Zein El-Abdin, professor of transport planning at Ain Shams's Faculty of Engineering.

Ayman Ghazi, a regular commuter, complains of the havoc which reigns over the minibus network. "Buses are crammed with passengers. Minibuses are overloaded despite the fact that this is prohibited by law. Drivers have no respect for timetables. They sit at the terminal for half an hour, ranting or fighting. They insult passengers as a matter of course."

Maissa El-Dowa, a Heliopolis resident who works in an office downtown, adds: "Many people going home from their jobs downtown have to take the minibus from Saraya Al-Qubba to Heliopolis, which is not reached by the underground metro. I can rarely take the minibus, though. The drivers always say the tank is empty and they need to go to the petrol station. So passengers are either forced to wait for half an hour until another minibus arrives, or hand themselves over to the taxi mafia."

But passengers are not the only ones who seem to think they have a raw deal. "All day long, the streets are bumper to bumper. There is not a rush hour — it's rush hour all day long. And if we do one thing wrong, there goes part of our salary," says Fawzi El-Sayed, a minibus driver. "We get a commission according to the number of passengers we drive a day and we're tied to a certain schedule. That's why sometimes we take on extra passengers or take a short-cut to save time," adds Abdel-Rahman Khodeir, a colleague.

Although 800,000 commuters ride the 700 buses of the Cairo Bus Company daily, and another 3,650,000 take the 3,300 buses and 700 minibuses of the Public Transport Authority, this huge arsenal does not suffice. Three times the number of buses currently available would go a little way towards improving the situation, and at least 500 new drivers would be required to drive the new buses. But the salaries offered to bus drivers are not exactly bringing in throngs of applicants. The vicious circle continues: the losses incurred by the companies make it impossible to raise salaries or increase the number of buses.

"The main reason for our losses is the difference between the actual cost of a ticket and the price at which it is sold to the public. The annual loss is estimated at LE40 million. Other reasons are the high taxes and exorbitant customs levied on imported spare parts, as well as the increase in the price of locally produced buses from LE200,000 to LE500,000. But the price of a ticket has not risen more than 10 piastres during the past five years," says engineer El-Ahmadi Abdel-Hadi, head of the Cairo Bus Company.

The tram to Heliopolis has also come under fire. Although the tram lines have been extended, the service itself has deteriorated: the rails are in terrible condition, and the number of cars has not been increased proportionately to the increase in the number of customers. Many have preferred the hazards of the minibus, or the overburdened bus system: "Although the number of trams running the line increased from 50 one-carriage trams in 1938 to 105 three-carriage trams in 1989, the actual number of working units is only 30. The 75 others are no longer running. With this actual decline, and the lack of funds to introduce new trams, each of these 30 transports more than 1,200,000 passengers a year. Because of the pressure, the tram operates at 40 per cent of its actual potential. "That's why passengers often have to wait more than an hour," says engineer Effat Badr, head of the Tram Authority's technical department.

Only the metro seems to be running fairly efficiently. Even this means of transportation is not problem-free, however: tragically, a recent accident left several dead because the signal announcing the presence of a train in the station had inadvertently been switched off. Yet there are plans to increase the *number or trains on the existing line. "With the in*crease from 300,000 to more than a million passengers a day, the committee raised the number of trains from 52 to 106 units, and a contract to import an additional 24 units was signed last February. Another 204 trains will start working when the first phase of the second stage begins in mid-1996, so the time between each departure and subsequent arrival will be reduced to 2.5 minutes," says Abdel-Salam Saad, head of the Metro Committee.

Improving cheap, efficient public transportation is a definite priority for Cairo planners. Some would say the Chinese solution is drastic: then again, it worked.

Pot Pourri

Women's vote

Post-election day at the hairdresser's salon: Nagwa, a well-known professional woman, is greeted by *several women in rollers. "Why didn't you* run for the elections?" asks someone. "I would have voted for you." All the women approve. They are really sorry that Nagwa did not run. "At least you would get things done," says an older woman, wiping *henna* off her face. "I have better things to do," scoffs Nagwa. "Did you vote then?" asks someone else. "Who for?" she asks with sarcasm. The women nod knowingly. None of them bothered to vote. They are well informed though, and could have made time to go to the polls. "Will anything change if I vote?" asks Yumna with a smile. "As long as all the MPs are men, nothing will change," says Alia. "Can they stop wars? Can they feed the people? *All they do is play their silly games*."

The conversation drifts around violence, people who got hurt, others who had heart attacks. "They are so keen to serve the people that they are ready to kill for the privilege," says a woman.

I am left to wonder; all the women present are educated, experienced professional women who do wonders balancing their jobs, families and social communities. Yet none of them would go near the polls. They all imply that men, yet again, are little boys playing at being grown-ups. They all remind me of mothers who disapprove of their sons' antics. For generations they have been taught to look on and keep quiet and this is what they are doing now. They have little hope that things will change unless they get down to the business of changing them themselves. And right now, they are too busy with their newly acquired independence; politics are not their priority. Their families come first. But who knows? Maybe one day, fed up with watching men fumbling along, messing things up, they will decide that enough is enough and take to running the country. I think of Um Amr, working to feed a family of eight, of Um Alaa, who exhausts herself every day to save enough money to build a small house, of Sherine, who went to work in an office after the death of her husband to provide for her three little girls, and of Nadia, who runs a factory and is doing better than many men I know. None of these women were trained to work; they were meant to stay at home and look after husbands and children. Circumstances, more often than not, forced them out of the home. They have had to invent their strategies, organise new lives for themselves and their children. Yet few have collapsed, had heart attacks or spent time worrying about their cholesterol levels. They were much too busy getting on with their lives. The weaker sex? Give me a break. More like the better half.

A friend who works in development was telling me that an unexpected result of women's empowerment was the fact that, once they started *earning money, their men were only too hap*py to stay at home. "So basically, we are often increasing women's burden, not providing the family with an extra income."

Years ago, Molly, a young executive secretary, was aware of this masculine trait. Although she was earning a large salary, she quit her job as soon as she had put her wedding dress away in mothballs. Every day she had new demands. "Don't be so hard on him," I advised, pitying her new husband. "Don't be silly," she said. "Men need to be pushed. If I told him that what he earns is enough, he would soon be taking a rest. He could enjoy his *far niente* and send me back to my typewriter." The last I heard, the husband was well on his way to becoming a millionaire and Molly was discussing the number of carats in her latest diamond ring.

But few women today act like Molly. They are much more apt to shoulder part of the responsibility, or all of it as the case may be. Actually, many of my friends would be ashamed — or maybe afraid — to depend financially on a man. But while so many have shown so much courage and ability, they leave the running of the country to the men they don't trust with their own household. Is it because women consider politics a futile endeavor? Or is it because men, afraid of the competition, are keeping politics, like football, to themselves?

Having proved that we can beat men easily at so many of their own games, isn't time that we gave running the country a try? Men could then keep their monopoly on football and take their thugs along to help their team win.

Fayza Hassan

Sufra Dayma

Turkey with noodles and almonds

Ingredients:
1 turkey
1 packet of noodles (*she'reya*)
1/2 kg. almonds (skinned)
Chicken stock
1 cup of lemon juice
Mandarine rind
1/4 cup of milk
Salt, pepper, nutmeg and bay leaves
Butter

Method:
Wash the turkey, then season very well, inserting a few bay leaves within the legs and under the skin. Rub with the mandarin rind, then smear with the lemon juice, sprinkle the milk and cook in a pre-heated medium oven until golden. In a cooking pan, fry the noodles in butter until brownish in colour then add the stock, covering the noodles by 2cms. When it boils and absorbs the liquid, lower the heat and leave over a simmering ring until the noodles become fluffy. Fry the almonds in butter until golden. Serve the turkey in the middle of a wide plate with the noodles around it and the almonds on top of them.

Merry Christmas!

Moushira Abdel-Malek

Restaurant review

In praise of the possible

Nigel Ryan *sits in a corner*

La Piazza is a serious restaurant, a thing that is as rare in Cairo as anywhere else. I do not mean that it is serious in the menu-snob way. The pseudo-smart restaurant stand-bys, dependent on *up-market convenience foods, do not appear on* the menu. You will not find truffled lobster tails but then who, in their right mind, would spend a small fortune on frozen lobsters and tinned truffles. Rather, La Piazza keeps its eye on the possible, which means that someone has thought realistically about what is available locally, and then given thought as to how it might best be prepared.

The restaurant is part of the Four Corners complex in Zamalek, located in a modern, rather discreet building on Al-Gezira Wosta. It has its own entrance on the street, which leads to the elevator, which leads to the restaurant. It is light and airy, avoiding the dimly lit, more intimate atmosphere of its more expensive counterpart, Justine's, a fact that makes it as ideal for lunch as it is pleasant in the evening. The interior is perhaps a little more patio than piazza — all trellises and trailing greenery. It is comfortable and does not, as is too often the case, ostentatiously scream design.

The service is excellent. At first glance the menu seems extensive, though I have always tended to restrict myself to fish. Given that La Piazza purports to be the Italian branch of the Four Corners' operation this might seem a little perverse. But what it does do is to make ordering a little less complicated than might otherwise be the case. And the fish has never disappointed.

To begin at the beginning. A mixed salad with Italian dressing. That small but increasing band of self-appointed food hygienists who vociferously denounce anything that is un-prepackaged and prefer to forgo fresh produce unless it is bought from a foreign embassy commissary *should note* that the *tomatoes* are *skinned*. So too are the sweetly pickled peppers. You cannot peel lettuce, nor radiccio, though no doubt there are those who would if they could. It would be foolish not to peel beetroot. The person I was dining with — no food fetishist he, but over sixty and able to serve an ace on Friday morning — pronounced it the finest salad in Cairo. This may well be true.

And then came the fish. The *garoupa* had been poached, the liquor flavoured with whole cloves of roasted garlic and diced tomato. It was accompanied with green rice. The food was simple, preparation kept to a minimum. I have never had fish that tasted anything other than fresh at La Piazza, nor has it ever been overcooked. The sauce, if slightly reduced, has never been thickened. A little butter but none of those heavy, Escoffier concoctions. The food is healthy, without being ludicrously so. There is no attempt to do anything impossible, but within the realms of possibility, all that has to be done is done extraordinarily well.

A chocolate mousse for pudding, which is hardly adventurous ordering, but which again was excellent. The bill could have been LE120, though two bottles of wine pushed it nearer LE200. And I have no doubt that my companion won his tennis game in the morning.

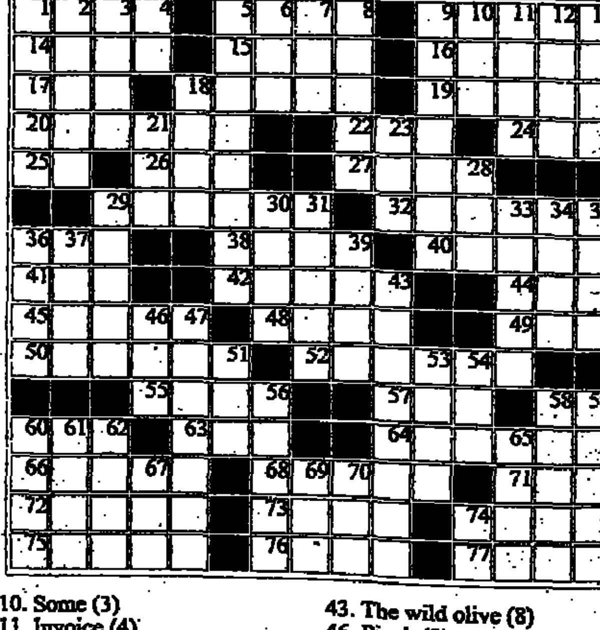
One note — it is wise to reserve at La Piazza in the evening, particularly on weekends.

La Piazza, at the Four Corners, Al-Gezira Al-Wosta. Tel: 3401647

Al-Ahram Weekly

Crossword

By Samia Abdennour



ACROSS

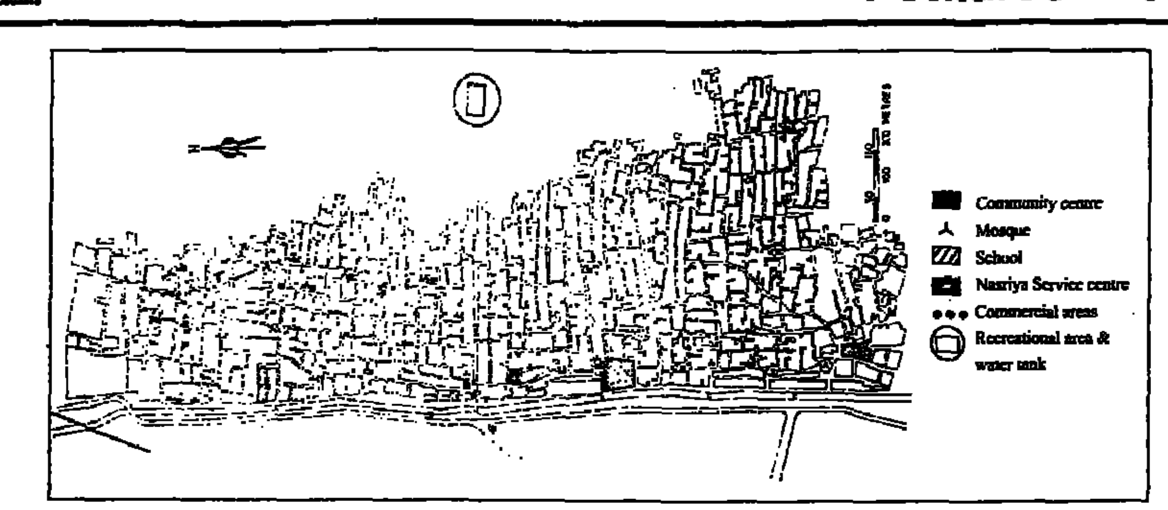
1. God of Thunder (4)
5. Health resorts (4)
9. Junta (5)
14. Be delirious, talk wildly (4)
15. Assignment (4)
16. Old-womanish (5)
17. Pub popular drink (3)
18. Well pleased (5)
19. Synthetic material (5)
20. Obscure (6)
22. Goal (3)
24. Conducted (3)
25. Elevated train (2)
26. Poetic for olden times (3)
27. Nettle (4)
29. Shunt, detour, hyph. wds (6)
33. Fright (6)
36. Definite article (3)
38. Portrayal (4)
40. Gravy (5)
41. Manipulate (3)
42. Italian cathedral (5)
44. Saints, abb. (3)
45. Field of conflict (5)
48. Make water turbid by stir ring (4)
49. Small drink (3)
50. Small (6)
52. Handsome (6)
55. Shove (4)
57. Part of auxiliary verb (3)
58. Sun god (2)
60. Owns (3)
63. Smallest bill (3)
64. Type of scented wood (6)
66. Furnish (5)
68. Fleshy (5)
71. Commotion (3)
72. Stagger (5)
73. Impel (4)
74. Noted British college (4)
75. Simpleton (5)
76. Nurture (4)
77. Hawaiian type of goose (4)

DOWN

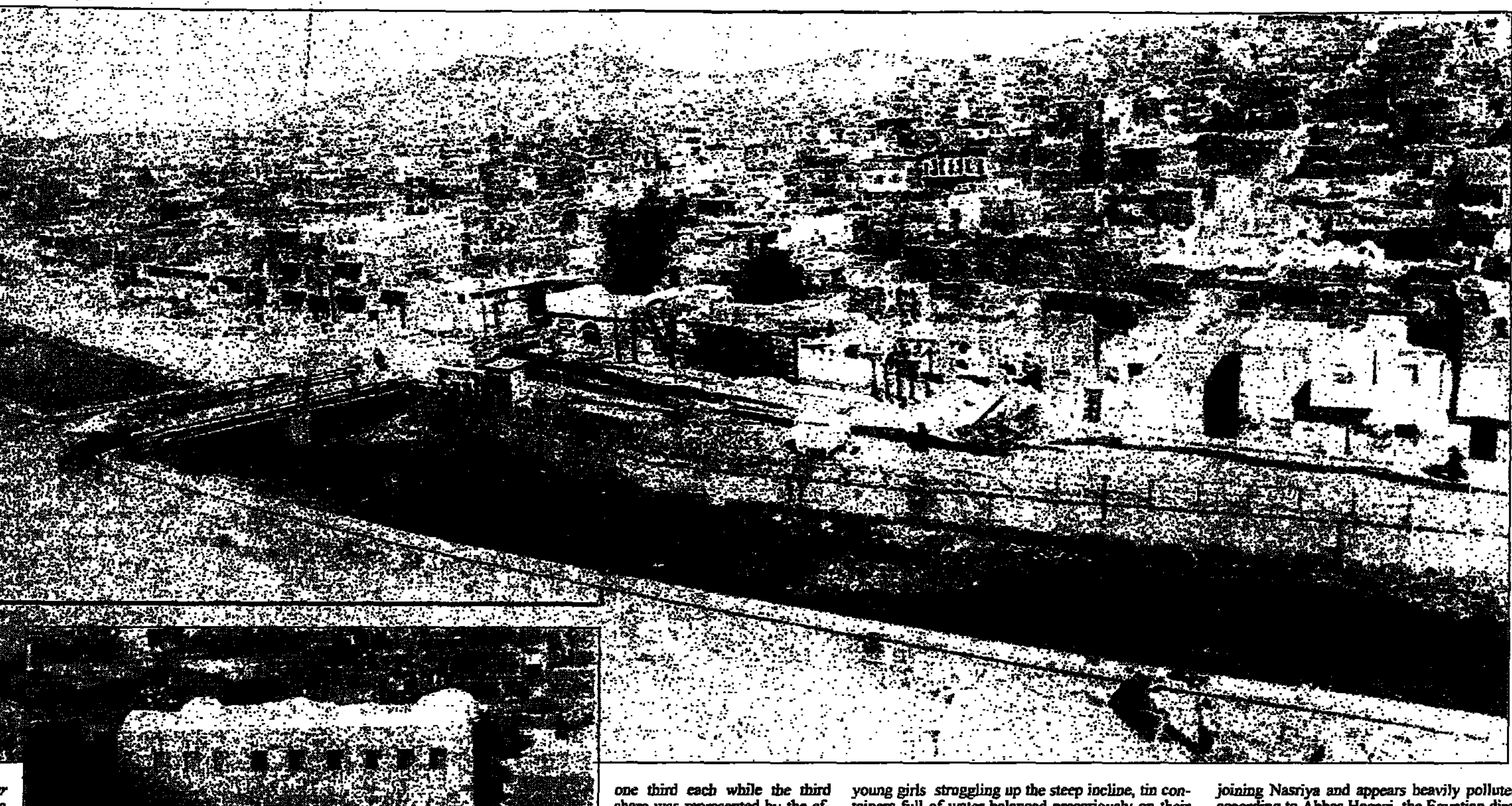
1. Do business (5)
2. Kill meat as prescribed by Islam (5)
3. Finished (4)
4. Musical note (2)
5. Model, paradigm (8)
6. Mash, pulp (3)
7. Cleopatra's killer (3)
8. High hit at cricket (5)
9. Tests eggs for freshness by holding between eyes and light (7)
10. Some (3)
11. Invoice (4)
12. Genus of bitter herbs (4)
13. Advance (4)
18. Assist (4)
21. Low island or reef (3)
23. Egg of louse (3)
28. Time period (3)
29. Procreate (5)
30. Vinegarish (4)
31. Small one-masted vessel (5)
33. Impaired by neglect and in need of furbishing (5)
34. Comb. form for "eight" (4)
35. Intermission; residue (4)
36. Pitfall (4)
37. Employ (4)
39. Arab prince (4)
43. The wild olive (8)
46. Pinch (3)
47. Degeneration; wasting away (7)
51. Ages and ages (3)
53. Platter (4)
54. X (3)
56. Raise objections to (5)
58. Radioactive element (5)
59. Separate (5)
60. Grasped (4)
61. Water (4)
62. Foaming waters (4)
65. Engagement (4)
67. International Commission for Fisheries, abb. (3)
69. Poetic for "before" (3)
70. ... Khan (3)
74. Printing measure (2)

Last week's solution

A shelter... at a price



Self-help has become a catch phrase these days when it comes to providing for the poor. Fayza Hassan visits an informal settlement, "upgraded" through the efforts of its inhabitants — Egypt's showpiece at this week's Habitat II conference in Cairo





In *National Experience with Shelter Delivery for the Poorest Groups*, a publication of the United Nations Centre for Human Settlements (Habitat), Nairobi 1994, Assistant Secretary-General N'Dow writes that "in a number of cases, the introduction of enabling shelter strategies have actually damaged the choices of the poorest groups. "In fact," he states, "among these experiences that have been identified as successful very few have succeeded in involving and including the poorest households." One such experience — that of the Nasriya Upgrading Project — may well illustrate the point.

Nasriya is located approximately two kilometres east of Aswan's centre. The area is stony and mountainous, rising gently at first then steeply from a height of 93 metres to a height of 150 metres above sea level. Nasriya's western side is bordered by a heavily polluted flood-water canal, the Kima canal, so named after the chemical products company that dumps waste into its waters. To the east, the mountain, home to several colonies of scorpions, is still deserted. To the south and north the quarter reaches Nubian settlements *without clear* demarcations and to the northwest it ends in a large industrial complex. The entire area covers approximately 100 hectares with a population of around 60,000, divided into 6,000 households. The average monthly income is LE50 to LE150 per family.

From the start the settlement was not considered altogether illegal although there were no clear guidelines regarding the registration of land. The first settlers, who came in the early 1930s, were mainly Nubian families displaced by the raising of the old Aswan Dam. The descendants of these families are still part of the communities who live in Nasriya today. More resettled Nubians came in the 1960s before the High Dam was completed. Immigration from Kom Ombo and Edfu and later from other provinces to the north increased the numbers attracted by employment opportunities afforded by *the opening of factories* in Aswan. They were joined by residents of the adjoining Tabia quarter, displaced as a result of ground clearance to make room for the building of Aswan's largest mosque. *Finally, at the time of the* building of the Aswan High Dam, workers streamed in from many provinces and settled with their families after the dam was inaugurated.

After 1966, the growth rate of Nasriya stabilised at around four per cent a year.

Early in 1986, the Egyptian General Organisation of Physical Planning (GOPP) and the German Gesellschaft fur Technische Zusammenarbeit (GTZ), both implementing agencies for their respective governments' projects, considered the possibility of an urban development plan for Aswan including an upgrading project to be used as a test model. Nasriya was chosen with the approval of the governor of Aswan, not least because its inhabitants were prepared to cooperate in finding a solution to the problems caused by the practical non-existence of infrastructure in the area. The project had thus the added advantage of taking into consideration the needs and wishes of the heteroclite groups in the community, uniting them in the pursuit of a common goal.

The *immediate* needs were identified by the study group which included representatives from GOPP, GTZ, the community, and a number of technical experts.

A plan was drawn up which included the following components: the implementation of a waste-water network; construction of a water supply network with a pumping station and a water tank; the organisation of a waste disposal system (the mountainous terrain is not readily accessible *and the inhabitants of Nasriya used the shore of the* water-flood canal as a garbage dump), the construction of a service centre, as well as other amenities such as playgrounds and sports areas; the upgrading of existing schools and the youth centre, the setting up of kindergartens; and the landscaping of the remaining open areas. Social programmes were studied and a plan to offer a freehold on the land proposed. The Egyptian and German governments shared the cost of the project to the tune of *one third each while the third* share was represented by the efforts of the people of Nasriya, who contributed their labour.

Architect Hani El-Miniawi, chief executive officer of Appropriate Development, Architecture and Planning Technologies (ADAPT) and consultant to the project, describes with enthusiasm this phase of the project, during which the inhabitants of Nasriya spent their evenings and well into the night digging trenches after the day's work. The spirit was incredible, he says, with women and children making tea or carrying small loads and joining in as the workers' songs rang in the evening air. According to El-Miniawi, the experience has changed the inhabitants of Nasriya, binding them together and making them more amenable to *the idea of improvements. It has* given them self-confidence and has turned them into achievers. Many have rallied now behind their *community* representatives to organise educational and cultural programmes at the community centre. He credits only the inhabitants for what has been achieved so far.

The waste-water network has been completed, although it is not very clear how many households are actually connected to the main. Each connection costs LE300 per household, a hefty sum to be disbursed by the inhabitants of the area considering that it represents between two and six times the average monthly income per family. The same applies to the drinking water network, for which the house connection costs *LE200. In* other words, having supplied the labour in laying down the general infrastructure for the community as a whole, the inhabitants have had to pay for the individual house connections. Yet *only about three or four* per cent of the houses have no running water, says El-Miniawi. All others have been able to pay since they are allowed to do so in easy instalments. The price for house connections to water mainlines ranges between LE150 to LE600 throughout Egypt, so Nasriya is not exceptional in this respect. Taps are conveniently placed in the narrow streets, and it is not uncommon to see women filling the traditional plastic "jerry can" at the "fountain", or *young girls struggling up the steep incline, tin containers* full of water balanced precariously on their heads.

Most of the houses stand now on subdivided plots, of which 4,774 were already registered in 1986. More have been registered since and the option of buying the plot is actively encouraged. Prices are kept well below market value for the time being, at LE5, LE7, and LE10 a square metre according to location. The proceeds of the land sale are earmarked for improvements in Nasriya. A land sale office has been opened in the community centre to help the inhabitants with the paperwork and a programme of purchase by instalment. There are, however, few real safeguards to prevent future land speculation, which would undoubtedly result in pushing the poorer sections of the community out: the temptation to sell their land, upgraded through their own efforts, for a small profit would be hard to resist for the inhabitants.

Houses in Nasriya are either traditional rural one- or two-room dwellings, constructed in mud-bricks or stone blocks with roofs of mud and straw, or in a modified version, with a concrete roof allowing for a second floor to be built at a later stage. A number *of modern houses can also be seen with walls of* concrete and cement blocks, these usually rising to include four storeys.

While a trend to build larger multi-storey complexes *is noticeable. this is generally discouraged.* El-Miniawi is lending his support to a project still in its experimental stages to produce a new brick made of clay which, he says, has the characteristics of the old mud-brick, now outlawed to preserve the valuable topsoil used in its manufacture. The clay brick will remain quite affordable and will present most of the advantages of the mud-brick, says El-Miniawi.

A community centre built on the same principle as the infrastructure, using Nasriya labour whenever possible, has been completed and attempts are made to pull together as many segments of the community as feasible under the guidance of the community leaders. Several committees have been set up to deal with a small loan programme targeted at the more vulnerable members of the *community*, namely young men and women. A clinic, a family planning centre, a laboratory, a pharmacy and a few shops are housed in the centre and have started operating in the afternoons. Among the vital *services* provided at the clinic *is* an antidote to scorpion stings, saving the time of travelling all the way to the nearest hospital in Aswan and thus reducing the number of fatalities. A modern bakery is also functional except that, according to the inhabitants, it seems chronically short of flour.

The flood-water canal which previously served as the only place for dumping refuse still carries waste-water from the industrial complexes *adjoining* Nasriya *and appears heavily polluted*. But, according to Abbas Hegazi, the Egyptian director of the project, and engineer Mohamed Foda, its legal advisor, the canal is at present the object of a study which includes a water purification station allowing the waters to be used to irrigate the green areas which are planned for the surroundings of Nasryia.

The construction of a women's community centre is now high on the agenda and the young women involved in the project are very eager to see it completed. At the present time they use a few rooms in the existing centre but, they say, many more women would participate in cultural, religious or vocational events if they felt that the centre was for women only. Community representatives and those involved in the project are noticeably enthusiastic about both achievements and future plans, although some of the ordinary dwellers tend to err on the side of caution and seem ill informed as to what is going on.

The women's centre is planned on higher ground, reaching to the top of the hill, which commands a Nile view and where the land will be subdivided into larger plots of 200 metres each, selling for LE25 a square metre. At present, the sale of these *plots is said to be restricted to those already living* in Nasriya and, according to Foda, there is a long waiting list.

One can easily identify some of the weak points *of such a professionally sustained self-help* approach, not least of which are the problems of maintaining both the infrastructure and amenities once outside assistance has been withdrawn. Moreover, there are no inbuilt safeguards preventing land speculation which could send prices rocketing. It is also obvious that such projects will not specifically cater for the poorest sections of the community, who may actually become further alienated.

But the self-help approach is increasingly being resorted to as the government's way of improving the living conditions of the poor, and it is therefore important to note that Nasriya can boast some visible achievements. By using self-help strategies combined with adequate financing and competent cadres, the trend towards environmental degradation seems to have been actually reversed. Whether *in this instance the poorest households will stand to* benefit or simply be pushed out of a settlement that can no longer provide for the cheapest possible shelter, remains to be seen.

According to Habitat's Assistant Secretary-General N'Dow, "those cases in which the very poor have benefitted have come about only through deliberate action on the part of the government or of the community concerned, usually in the form of direct subsidies and/or specific assistance... In other words, there is possibly no solution [for the poorest segments] other than direct assistance from governments for those who cannot (or are unlikely to) be reached even by the enabling approach."

The experience of participating in the upgrading of the area has bound its inhabitants together. *On the whole experts give a good rating to the project and its* implementation. Could it be used as a future model? The International Conference on Improving the Living Environment for the Urban Poor will discuss this issue and others, this week at a three - day symposium from 18 to 21 December







Life has changed for the inhabitants of the area say the developers; but has it? Households with no water connections still resort to the traditional ways

Edited by **Fouad El-Gawhary**



A new slant on the entrance to the Coptic Museum

Photo: Sherif Sonbol

Trek down Babylon way

In this second of an occasional series of "close encounters", **Jessica Jones** takes a morning to explore the alleyways of Coptic Cairo, the centre of the city's Christian heritage, before hopping on the metro to Maadi

At the Mar Girgis stop on the metro line lie the remains of a fort built by the Roman emperor Trajan in 130AD on the site of an earlier structure. Known as the Babylon of Egypt, this Roman outpost was flanked by two massive towers. Today one of the towers is incorporated into the structure of a Greek Orthodox church. The other stands alone: although most of it is crumbling, a section has been restored and can be seen by passers-by on their way into one of the area's landmarks, the Coptic Museum.

Among the most striking buildings remaining in what is now known as Old Cairo are the "Hanging Church", the Ben Ezra Synagogue, and the Coptic Museum, which contains the best collection of Coptic art and artefacts in the world. It is possible to see all three in a morning.

Because the Muslim leader Amr Ibn Al-As, who formally conquered Babylon in 641, chose to build his Arab capital of Fustat outside the earlier, largely Christian settlement, the survival of Babylon was ensured despite the vicious fires that destroyed Fustat in the 12th century. Today, while Fustat is little more than a vista of dusty rubble and a favourite haunt of wild dogs, with the exception of a small section which has been opened for excavation, Old Cairo's Roman towers continue to guard the monuments, some of which date from the early Christian era.

The seventh-century Church of the Virgin, on the main street facing the metro station, south of the Coptic museum, is popularly known as the Hanging Church, because of its location 'suspended' between two bastions of the old Roman fort. Built over an earlier structure believed to date from the fourth century, it has been destroyed once and restored twice. The building has survived as an important Christian centre of Cairo, although the zealous Fatimid Caliph Al-Hakim did manage to turn it into a mosque during his lifetime.

Unlike the other carefully aligned religious buildings of the area, the Hanging Church is asymmetrical. The central nave does not bisect the congregational area of the church but instead noticeably leaves more space on the left than the right. The central altar is dedicated to the Virgin Mary, the north altar to John the Baptist, and the remaining shrine pays tribute to Saint George, a Roman legionary who defied his superiors to convert to Christianity. Worshippers brought his body to the church several centuries after his death.

Though the interior is dark, the Hanging Church is not sombre. Votive candles illuminate corners that would otherwise remain in darkness. Inlaid wood and mother-of-pearl altar screens shield the shrines, while centuries-old icons of the Virgin and various saints gaze at the congregation from watchful posts above the altar. A small shrine located in a side room, dedicated to the patron saint of Ethiopia, Takla Hamanout, features wall paintings from the seventh or eighth centuries.

Though the majority of Babylon's inhabitants were Christian, a smaller but significant Jewish population lived within the old city walls. The Ben Ezra Synagogue is the oldest in Egypt. In the twelfth century, Rabbi Abraham Ben Ezra of Jerusalem travelled to Egypt especially to improve the then-dilapidated building and minister to the spiritual needs of its community.

Recent restoration has once again given the synagogue a new life. Restored wall paintings complement carefully repaired mother-of-pearl and wood panels. Cupboards inscribed with the 19th and early 20th century names of their donors line the ground level of the building and provide space for holy books. Torah scrolls are soon to be installed in their traditional place, and then it is planned that the synagogue will become an official place of worship again.

The records that have survived of the Ben Ezra community constitute priceless historical additions to libraries from Russia to the United States, but, ironically, none have remained in Egypt. Eight centuries' worth of marriage documents, personal letters and property deeds were among the wealth of papers deposited here. Beginning in the nineteenth century, curious explorers and historians came to Egypt to acquire these documents, which then made their way into various public and private collections around the world. Known as the Geniza documents, they constitute the largest single collection of medieval secular records.

After wandering through Old Cairo's alleyways and churches, a tour of the Coptic Museum, whose entrance is between the watchtowers of Babylon facing the metro, provides a fascinating insight into Egypt's Christian heritage.

The museum contains a melange of Christian items from various periods: marble columns and capitals from the ruins of monasteries, wooden and mother-of-pearl altar screens from churches dating from as early as the 12th century, and upstairs, textiles, crosses, and a collection of manuscripts that includes an 11th century Coptic psalter found in a young girl's coffin from Beni Suef. Though the collection of items is not always organised in historical sequence, it is interesting to try and trace the development of certain Coptic themes, such as floral decorations resembling Roman motifs, crosses in various shapes and sizes; one can also speculate as to when the ostrich egg, an ancient Egyptian symbol, was adopted by the Copts as a symbol of their own.

After a few hours among the cobblestoned lanes of Old Cairo, a five-stop trip down the metro line takes one to a very different neighbourhood.

Maadi is a leafy suburb, formerly popular with and largely developed by the British. The residential area is now popular with both Egyptians and expatriates, mainly Americans. Victory College, the Lycée Français and the Cairo American College, all well-known schools, are located here.

The neighbourhood has a character all of its own. Couples wearing bermuda shorts walk well-cared for dogs down the shady, tree-lined streets. On Road 9, a British woman with a deep brown tan rides her bicycle to the local vegetable stand, where she carefully places a bag of zucchini and carrots into her sturdy wicker basket before speeding away.

The apartment buildings and shops of the post-revolution building boom have changed the patrician atmosphere of Maadi to some degree. "When I first came the place felt like a small village, with more trees and no flats," says Safia Muein El-Arab, a resident of the neighborhood since 1945. "But the original character of the place is still the same," she concedes, though she wishes fellow residents were more vigilant about protecting their shrubs and trees. Despite the passage of time, Cairo's neighbourhoods — from Coptic Cairo to modern Maadi — retain their unique character.

Restorers par excellence

Polish archaeologists' reputation as conservationists dates from the operation to salvage Nubia's monuments. Now they are involved in important work at Kom Al-Dikka, as **Jill Kamil** reports

Back in 1960, the Polish Archeological Research and Conservation team in Cairo made a sensational discovery right in the heart of Alexandria: a late Roman theatre that served as an odeon. It has now been restored and is open to the public.

More recent work at the site has resulted in the discovery of a Roman residential district in the immediate neighbourhood of the odeon, and excavation is being uniquely combined with a concerted conservation project aimed at opening the site to the public in about two and a half years.

Professor Włodzimierz Godlewski's approach to conservation is "do as little as necessary, not as much as possible". In his opinion, the questions of what should be restored, and how much, were as vital as what material and equipment to use. His philosophy is 'don't hurry'. Conservation, he believes, has to be carried out slowly so that both the shape of the structure and its substance (ie material) are properly conserved.

This might all be very easy if a stone monument has simply *fallen to ruin and needs to be* re-erected. But in this case, the whole town was totally destroyed long before the Arab and Persian conquests of Egypt. As Godlewski pointed out, Graeco-Roman settlements are normally thought of in terms of splendid marble colonnades and statues, but at Kom Al-Dikka there is evidence that the area had become so unhygenic that the people had abandoned it. "Water pipes were connected to the sewage," he said. "Latrines were beside tanks built to collect rain water. Our excavation of the area shows that life there was terrible. Garbage littered the place, and stone had been pillaged to re-use elsewhere."

Out of these derelict and unwholesome remains, Polish restorers have excavated and restored public baths, gymnasia and even villas that were built as early as the first and second centuries. Great columns lying in shattered pieces have been ingeniously pieced together, extant substructures have been built up to support higher architectural elements, and out of chaos is emerging a perspective of what the site was like at the time when culture, music and theological dialogues dominated central Alexandria.

Most people in search of Graeco-Roman Alexandria are disappointed with what remains of the city which was once the greatest port on the Mediterranean. But now, thanks to the Polish archaeologists and restorers, a picture of that greatness is beginning to appear. The extraordinary town that was lived in, built and adorned by many kings up until the Roman conquest, and then destroyed by earthquakes and urban expansion, both ancient and modern, is now re-emerging from the rubble.

Meanwhile, Polish archaeologists continue to work at many other sites in Egypt, including a long-term project on the Temple of Queen Hatshepsut, a Graeco-Roman settlement at Marina Al-Alamein, Kom Sidi Youssef at Tell Atrib near Benha, and the Church of the Archangel Gabriel in Fayoum, as well as the great funerary complexes of Emir El-Kebir Qurqumas and Sultan Inal Ashraf in the necropolis north of Cairo.

Quiz

Wadi Natrun, located in the Western Desert between Cairo and Alexandria is famous for its monasteries.
Do you know the origins of its name?

The lucky winner of the November quiz is Elia Kamal Talkha of Kom Ombo, Aswan, who wins a three-day stay for two in the Sonesta Paradisio Hotel in Hurghada on a bed-only basis, courtesy of Sonesta Hotels, Resorts & Nile Cruises.

Name...
Address...
Tel. No. (if available)..
Answer to Question 1, issue 245
Answer to Question 2, issue 246
Answer to Question 3, issue 247
Answer to Question 4, issue 248

Post your entry to
Travel Quiz
Al-Ahram Weekly,
Al-Ahram,
9th Floor,
Sharia Al-Galaa,
Cairo.

Weekend travel

A rarely visited monastery

There are eight monasteries at the edge of an ancient burial ground on the western bank of the Nile near Gabal Al-Asas in Middle Egypt. **Samir Naoum Makkar** describes one of them



The Monastery of St Bokhtor (Victor) at Nagada is *one of the area's* earliest Christian structures. Its seventh century church, now in ruins, was built on the site of another that dates back to the fourth century.

Beneath the church lies evidence of different eras of occupation dating back to the dawn of ancient Egyptian civilisation, when Nagada was of great strategic importance due to its caravan links with the oases of the Western Desert. The monastery is built of mud brick and surrounded by a wall. Numerous ancient pottery shards, red or black-tipped, some with white drawings and geometrical designs, others with human, animal, bird and plant shapes have been found there.

Nagada, in the Coptic language, derives from the word *ni*, and *qadi* or *qadi*, which means "city of the intelligent". By tradition, it was founded by Queen Helena, mother of Constantine the Great.

Unusually, the church has its entrance on the extreme north-western part of the building. Most church doors are on the west side. "The only explanation for the entrance not being in the usual place is that the church was once much larger and that most of the western part has been lost," said Father Bimen, priest of Nagada. This is quite conceivable, as the church is built on a hillock believed to contain archaeological traces of much earlier occupation. It has four chancels, dedicated to St Victor, St Michael, the Blessed Virgin and St Menas.

The best, but not the rest

Practice makes perfect, but for some athletes; it is too late. A decision to send to the Atlanta Olympics only those athletes likely to win medals has athletes and officials at each others throats. Abeer Anwar reports

Less than stellar performances on the part of Egyptian wrestlers, weightlifters, and volleyball team members in various competitions came back to haunt them as officials in the National Olympic Committee (NOC) decided that only athletes expected to place at least 8th in the respective world championships will be allowed to compete in the 1996 Atlanta Olympics.

"In my opinion, this decision is fair," said Abdel-Moneim Wahba, head of the Sports Body. "What is unfair is to spend millions of pounds on athletes who, we know beforehand, will achieve nothing. We only want the best representing Egypt."

For *proven performers like the handball* team's 14 members, and individuals like Rania Elwani, Heba Rashid, Mustafa El-Quilini and others like them, this is good news. The handball team, having secured a 6th place ranking in last May's World Championship in Iceland, will be the only team sport representatives to be sent by Egypt to the Olympics.

But other sports officials view this move as a disincentive for the athletes, giving them little to strive for, and encumbering them with a sense of alienation. "Even if the individual athletes or teams travelling to Atlanta achieve nothing more than being exposed to other competitors, that, in itself, will be of great benefit," said Major Hassanein Omran, head of the Egyptian Basketball Federation and deputy head of the NOC.

Moreover, added Azmi Megahed, coach of the national volleyball team, "If we tabulate the costs incurred in travelling to the Olympics, for a team like the volleyball team, then the LE150,000 bill *is significantly less than the LE500,000* that will be spent on the same team for foreign training camps.

Aside from the fiscal concerns, the psychological toll this decision will have on athletes is serious, said *Kamal Darwish*, head of the *Egyptian* Boxing Federation (EBF). "It would be unfair for all the hard work exerted by athletes in preparation for this event to have been in vain," he stated. "This (decision) will greatly affect the performance levels *of the athletes, as it did with one* of my boxers, Khaled Abdel-Hamid, who attributed his loss in a recent competition to feeling demoralised after reading about the decision in the papers."

Officials of the National Olympic Committee, however, are *viewing the issue from, what they* deem to be, a pragmatic perspective. Explaining that this decision came as a result of public pressure to only field teams that will achieve high rankings, Hassan Mustafa, secretary of the NOC said. "The money we are spending comes from the pockets of the Egyptian people. At the very least, they have the right to require us to justify the expenditures by winning."

What is clear, however, is that the decision is mainly one of economic necessity. Mustafa explained that to minimise expenditure, the International Solidarity Committee, two years ago, selected six athletes which it has sponsored. These six will be among the nine individual athletes travelling to Altanta.

*Despite explanations given by the Olympic Com*mittee, federation officials are in a belligerent mood. The EBF is seriously considering withdrawing from the Egyptian Olympic delegation in protest of the decision. "I have been training five boxers to participate in the Olympics, and none are less talented than Mustafa El-Quilini, the boxer the NOC chose to participate. They all achieved 5th place in the last World Championship in Berlin," said Darwish.

The Egyptian Volleyball Federation, in a move to counter the NOC's budgetary argument, has decided to pay all the expenses of the national team when they go to Altanta. The team, EVF officials assert, will place in the top eight. They will then demand a refund for the costs from the NOC.

The federations, and other athletes, however, are keen to stress that realising the kind of results demanded by the nation's sports officials requires practice, funding and more practice.

Whether or not the federations' views will prevail over those of the NOC remains to be seen. But in the meantime, for Rania Elwani and Tamer Zeinhum (swimming), Heba Rashid and Basil El-Gharabawi (judo), Mohamed Khorshid (shooting), Ali Ibrahim (rowing), Mustafa El-Quilini (boxing), *Mustafa Abdel-Harris (body building)* and Tharwat El-Bendari (weightlifting), all systems are go for the Olympics


With a smile, Ghoneim returns a volley victoriously *photo: Ahmed Abdel-Razek*

Tennis, anyone?

AFTER 10 days of stiff competition, the Egyptian National Tennis Championship drew to a close last Sunday with some fanfare and a cloud of suspicion hovering over Egypt's no. 2 player, Amr Ghoneim.

Almost 500 players, of all ages, faced off in more than 500 matches on the courts of the Gezira Club. While a number of the top *ranked players did not participate* due to overseas travel and competitions, those that did attend made sure that the action was fast-paced and exciting. "It was a very *successful* and *beneficial* tournament, organisationally and technically, for the participants," said Mohamed Nada, the tournament's director.

Many of the players, based on their accomplishments, seemed to agree. After breezing through the preliminary matches, Amr Ghoneim, the former national champion, met Gihad El-Deeb in the finals. While Ghoneim won the match 6-2, 5-7, 3-6, 6-1, 6-0, El-Deeb was not discouraged. Chalking the loss up to inexperience, El-Deeb said, "I was quick, I stuck to the baseline and increased the power behind my shots."

With the singles title in the bag, Ghoneim teamed up with his brother, Ali, to defeat Basel Eisa and Omar El-Haggag 6-1, 6-3, in the doubles event. But, this was where Amr Ghoneim's luck ran out. The Egyptian Tennis Federation moved to suspend the LE5,000 pot that Ghoneim won until the investigation surrounding his use of abusive language in last month's satellite tournament in Dubai, is concluded. Declining to comment on the issue, Ghoneim added, "There are certain things I will say in the meeting with the federation that will clear my name."

The explanation, however, had better be convincing. "We're treating Ghoneim as a professional, so the penalty will be financial, not points," said Nada.

NA

Jailhouse rock

The Prison Administration introduces the newest in prison reform measures, a country club for the convicts and their guards. Could Club Med not be far behind asks Nashwa Abdel-Tawab

Serving hard time in Cairo's Torah Prison became a little easier for convicts when Prison Sector officials decided to build a sports club for prisoners and their guards. While the majority of Egypt's residents can't afford *membership to many of the* nation's clubs such as the Heliopolis or Gezira clubs, membership to this club entails, perhaps, stealing LE20,000 instead of paying it as membership dues.

If at first glance this gesture seems a little extravagant, Major General Nabil Seyam, director of the Prison Adminstration is quick to remind all would-be critics that prisoners, too, have rights. "To force prisoners to live day and night in their cells, without any form of recreation is the worst sort of punishment," he said.

Therefore, rather than risk them getting up to even more trouble, since idle hands are the devil's workshop, allowing them access to sports facilities is a means of burning up excess energy in a constructive way. In addition, the fact that prisoners and their guards are able to use this club, he noted, is an excellent way to deal with any sort of hidden animosity between the two groups.

Not all prisoners, however, have access to the facilities. Seyam explained that once the convicts are brought to the prison, they are given a battery of psychological tests, and are also categorised according to the kind of crime committed. As such, those convicted of felonies such as murder, or those categorised as *terrorists*, are not permitted to use the facilities since the risk would be too great.

For prisoners with exemplary prison records or who are otherwise eligible to use the facilities, there are a bevy of athletic options that await. The club has been divided into two sections. The first is for the prisoners and their conscripted guards, and the second is for the officers and their families. The club lies on a 42,000 square *metre plot of land* owned by the prison.

While the old chain gang days of rock breaking are not carried on within the confines of Torah Prison, convicts can participate *in a range of sports including* athletics, basketball, volleyball, handball, and soccer. The officers' section is more upscale, and boasts a restaurant, a state-of-the-art gym, two tennis courts, a squash court, a handball court, a croquet field, a basketball court, a volleyball court, a soccer stadium with room for 1000 spectators and a swimming pool with a sun deck. In *the adjoining garden there is a playground* for children, a club house which houses billiards and ping-pong tables, a restaurant and lounges.

To help boost prison morale, the soccer stadium will host several competitions between prison teams and guest teams made up of sports celebrities. In the past, prior to the construction of the club, prison teams had played against Ahli club and national team members.

If this club sounds too good to be true, then it probably is. The prisoners are not granted unlimited use of the facilities, after all, they are in prison. Rather, they are allowed a slot of time beginning at 7:00 am, where they excercise until the time they must report to their jobs. The officers and their families, however, will have use of facilities at any time. Matches between the guards and the prisoners will be organised on an occasional basis.

Lest anyone get too drawn by the allure of the new club, remember that to join one must first be convicted. In light of this realisation, Channel 2 on television sounds much more appealing.


The deteriorating old club (left), in contrast with the modernity of the new one with its gymnasium (middle), and chess court (right) *photos: Mohamed Moh. Lutfi*



KOs, all round

WELTERWEIGHT champion Hector "Macho" Camacho was charged with aggravated assault and domestic violence for allegedly pushing his pregnant girlfriend, Amy Torres. His *out-of-the-ring slugfest* did not result in injuries to the child or mother.

Argentina's Julio Cesar Vasquez, however, found more appropriate punching bags. Exhibiting the value of sheer persistence in boxing, Vasquez landed a powerful blow *on the mug of* US boxer, Carl Daniels and re-captured his WBA light middleweight title. Before the knockout punch, Vasquez had been trailing in points.

And for former World Heavyweight champion Mike Tyson, the undefeated Buster Mathis Jr. proved to be an *easy victory*. In round three of a scheduled-12 round bout, Tyson knocked out Mathis. The question now is, did Mathis still have the energy to sing "Feelings" afterwards.

Band Aid for Barrada

EGYPTIAN squash ace Ahmed Barrada left on Monday for Germany to receive treatment for an old injury sustained in England. Although he was suffering shoulder pains, Barrada *had competed for* Egypt in the World Squash Championship and placed third in the tournament.

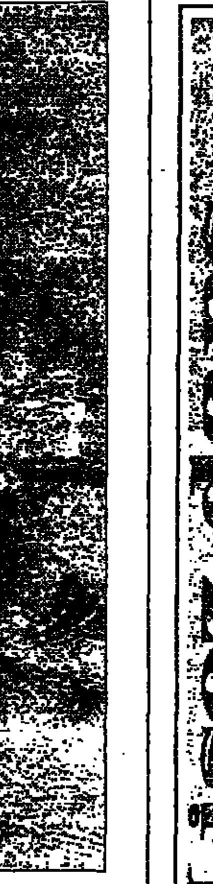
Strong performances by his teammates, Ahmed Fathi and Omar El-Borolossi earned each of them LE5,000 and invitations to a reception, honouring their achievements, held by the Egyptian Squash *Federation* and the Sports Body.

Row your boat

THE 23RD International Rowing Nile Race was held last Tuesday in Luxor. The race, which brought together 114 rowers from Germany, the US, Hungary, the Czech Republic and Egypt, began with a Pharaonic celebration in which the rowers carried their boats from Luxor Temple to the Temple of Karnak. They then soaked up some culture in the form of folkloric shows. Following the festivities the 200 metre race began. The different racing categories were in skiff, double scull, coxed-pair, coxed-four and coxed-eight for male and female juniors and seniors.

Edited by **Inas Mazhar**





MOHAMED HANI, a young up-and coming long distance swimmer is gearing up for the Port Said International Open Championship which will be held tomorrow. The 15km race is nothing new for the 16-year old swimmer. Hani was a silver medalist in the National Championship and a bronze medalist in the Egypt's Cup Championship. Following the Port Said Championship, he will take part in the Geneva Swimming Competition, and hopes *to add another gold to the long list of victories he has already* achieved.

Nader Fergany:
The pessoptimist

He is driven by a vision: that of a country slowly heading towards self-destruction. He has found a way of fighting back. He is not a wishy-washy intellectual, armed with a damp handkerchief and a worried frown. Statistics, he knows, are not just numbers


photo: Khaled El-Fiqi

For all those who came to know Nader Fergany in 1970, on his return from the US, where he had obtained his PhD at the University of Chapel Hill, North Carolina, he will remain a sort of hero: the very young professor who did not hesitate to side with his students against the Establishment, and shared their sentence, spending over a month in jail. But Fergany firmly rejects this title to fame. "It was more a chain of events," he says. "Some things were not right and I pointed them out and this is how, having rubbed the powers the wrong way, I came to be identified with the protests." Clearly, he has no intention of dwelling on his rebellious past. In fact, he would rather not talk about himself. No need to mention the sports car that he was driving at the time, or the clogs that he still wears — a subject of curiosity among many who have met him briefly.

Yet he is certainly not a shy person; his reluctance to indulge in biographical tidbits stems more from a genuine lack of interest in the particulars of his life than from false modesty. He is singularly single-minded: of hobbies, relaxation, entertainment, there is absolutely no mention. One feels it would be improper even to hint at such frivolities. The private domain is too specific: it does not call for excessive exposure. His whole attitude indicates that there are more important things than an individual's life anecdotes. "We tend to create personality cults or waste precious time in gossip," he says. "Individuals are not that important, their private lives should not become the focus of attention. It is what they achieve that should interest us."

He is fully intent on constantly steering the conversation away from his own life towards more abstract topics. The same point is made by his surroundings: The "modern Islamic" style of his apartment is more a case study in the possibilities of the genre than a hint as to the character of its owner. It is sober, organised, stripped down to the bare essentials. There is not one personal object in sight. It is serious, almost clinical. One cannot imagine Fergany staring idly for long hours at his greenery. More likely he rushes in and out, always in a hurry. Does he ever relax? He has a retreat somewhere in Giza where he spends his weekends, but there again he speaks of the fruit he is growing himself, conjuring up an image of the scientist experimenting with new grafts and anxiously observing the progress of each plant. He is a man with a mission, a man driven towards the goal he has set for himself.

But this was not always the case. He created the Al-Mishkat Research Centre as recently as 1993. Before that, he taught economics and statistics at Cairo University and in a few Arab countries, and had a spell with the United Nations, but his academic career has followed a bumpy road with promising starts grinding to abrupt halts whenever Fergany begged to differ. He often did, and never kept it to himself. Prudence and self-preservation are not items in his book of rules. Resigning from his post was his way of putting an end to any unpleasant situation — an uncompromising attitude which never earned him points in the popularity race.

He has never joined political organisations. Organised politics seems to him mostly superficial and has increasingly reflected vested interest. The only effective brand of radical politics is not to his liking. He is very serious and straightforward about what he believes in. His friends describe him as a true liberal, someone with strict principles and no prejudices, who scrupulously practises what he preaches: "the only man I know who is not a sexist deep down," says a long-time acquaintance. His former students all agree that he was a wonderful professor, remembering his supportive attitude in demonstrations and sit-ins during the days of widespread radical activism. Fergany's family is originally from Shabramant; he grew up in a popular neighbourhood of Giza. He excelled at the government schools he attended. "I come from a modest background, but my mother was a schoolteacher and I was given the advantages of an education very early," he explains. This is the reason he gives for having been only five or six years older than his students when he assumed his first teaching position. When he received a scholarship to pursue graduate studies in the States he was very young. It is during these years away form Egypt that his thinking matured, possibly influenced by the effects the Vietnam War was having on American campuses. He came back with clear ideas of what was right or wrong and plenty of stamina to pick bones where bones needed to be picked. His attitude from the start did not endear him to the Establishment, but for Fergany this never mattered: what was important was upholding the principle.

He never went after the cheers; respect, he says, is far more important. Eventually, he came to the conclusion that pitting his wits against established authority was a waste of time and energy. Now he works independently, applying both his strict principles and his extensive knowledge to his research. The Al-Mishkat Research Centre contributes to the development of a rigorous approach to social science. The data gathered, and analysed, by the centre provides material for a quantitatively informed methodology. He does not say it, but it is his way of serving his country, about which he worries to the point of anxiety. "Human resources," he says, "are our only wealth. We do not have oil or minerals, but we have people, and we should not squander their immense possibilities." But according to Fergany, this is just what we are doing. "Compare the state of our education now with what it used to be 150 years ago," he says. "We were ahead of Japan then. They used to send study missions to copy our education system. We were pioneers in women's education. The first girls' school opened 120 years ago. Look at us now." Fergany has all the statistics to prove his point. "We mostly do impressionistic social science here," he says.

A statistician by training, Fergany values information and has deep contempt for any discourse devoid of solid scientific bases. If we want to start developing our country seriously, only critical social science, he emphasises, will give a clear picture of the situation. He feels very strongly about the imperative necessity of improving education; he insists on the urgency, the gravity of the situation. His attitude is not informed scandal-mongering: one gets a feeling of impending disaster if we lag behind one minute longer. Does he have a solution? This is what the Al-Mishkat centre is all about: problems are studied, solutions are proposed, the findings are disseminated. But it seems that people don't read, don't understand or don't care, he says sadly. Although he believes his work is a contribution to a process of enlightenment in the long run, he has the feeling that we are sinking fast. He is angry with Egyptian intellectuals who fail to sound the alarm when there is still time. The intellectual's first duty is to society, he says. He deplores the use we make of television, which could become an invaluable educational tool in the struggle to eradicate illiteracy. He has more statistics: this time, about Asian countries which have succeeded in beating the same odds. Fergany, so reticent about his private life, has volumes to say about the state of education. Is he pessimistic about the future? "No. A pessimist gives up. I have no intention of doing so. I am just very worried — about the level of instruction offered by the schools, the fact that primary education has been reduced from six to five years, the dwindling access for poor girls to education, girls who receive only a few years of low quality primary schooling before they are married off or sent to work, all the children who have never set foot in a school, the young people who will be so ill-equipped to enter the twenty-first century and compete with more advanced countries, the lack of job opportunities which stifle the incentive of the poor to educate their children. And why should they?" he asks bitterly. "They can send their child to work and he or she will bring home an average of LE5 a day, whereas if they send him or her to school, after all the long years and the sacrifices he or she will end up making about half this amount." He is definitely not against professional and technical training; but first, children should know how to read, write and do elementary arithmetic operations, he says impatiently. Statistics show that children who have graduated from the elementary level today are incapable of even this minimum. Not only are we short of facilities, but even when we have them we do not achieve our aim of quality, he complains — an alternative type of education is a must. Fergany argues for the merits of a good, solid primary education for every Egyptian child, a positive step towards equal opportunities and a chance to lead a decent, productive life. Listening to him, it is easy to believe in the possibilities that his suggestions open up: a world where the very rich will not get richer while the poor sink deeper into poverty by the day, where children will have access to education and health care, and grow up to efficiently apply their acquired skills, where jobs will be available for the asking and performed to high standards, where food will be produced to nourish and not to poison, where our wealth will be preserved and our environment protected. Could it be possible? "Radical reform of education is not, by itself, sufficient to get Egypt out of its present predicament. A formidable array of institutional, social and political change is also needed", he says. Who said he was a pessimist?

Profile by ***Fayza Hassan***

Pack of Cards

by Madame Sosostris

❤ On these long winter nights, dears, I can't tell you how much I enjoy curling up with a good book. It's just the thing to take the edge off the cold, especially when accompanied by a mug of steaming hot cocoa. So I was delighted when I got wind that those red-hot scholars at the American University in Cairo Press were establishing the Naguib Mahfouz Medal for Literature. The award, which will be presented annually on 11 December, the birthday of my dear, dear friend and Nobel Laureate **Naguib Mahfouz**, will be given for the best contemporary novel published in Arabic. The lucky author will then have their masterpiece translated and published in English by the AUC Press, and simultaneously by publishing houses in New York and London. In addition, the winners will receive $1,000 plus the royalties accrued from their English language editions of the book. This, as you can imagine, will provide a real push to get me started again on the novel I've been working on for the past fifteen years. I know **Naguib** is excited; he told me recently that the announcement of this award, honouring writers and literature, was the most pleasurable event on his birthday.

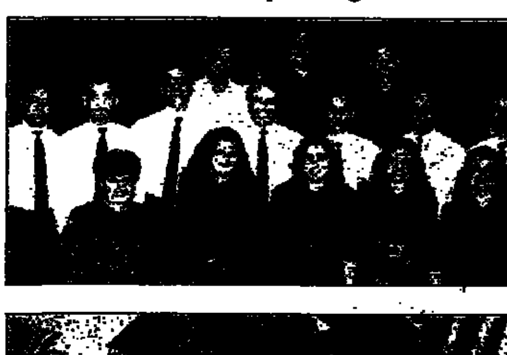
Mahfouz' birthday this year was actually quite a do. Held in the royal wing of the Helnan Shepheard Hotel, where the Nobel Laureate's weekly literary gatherings were once held, the party was attended by friends and acquaintances galore, including a life-long member of his literary circle, poet and engineer **Naim Sabri**, as well as the general manager of the hotel **Hossam El-Fiki**, and public relations manager **Inas Fouad**.

♣ Tra-la-la-la-la-la-la. Christmas is a-coming, dears, and with it, the heavenly pleasures of parties, gifts and good food and drink in blissful abundance. And what better way to totally put oneself in a festive mood than to listen to the angelic voices of a carolling choir. My good friend conductor and composer **Eng. Maged Adel** formed the Better Life Team in 1978, and ever since, the thirty members, including ten children, have gained tremendous recognition. The heart soars, dears, it truly does, when one hears their divine blend of traditional church music and the sound of the Mediterranean. There's really no other way to say it, dears. If you want your heart to sing and the festive spirit to grab hold, make sure you hear them some time this week. I personally prefer open air shows, so I'll be going to see them at Al-Salam Hotel on Friday and the Mövenpick in Heliopolis on Christmas Eve at 7pm. For those of you who are more into acoustics, then the Semiramis tonight at 7pm, the Marriott on Saturday at 5pm and the World Trade Centre on Christmas Day at 7pm are just the places for you to be.

♣ Our very own photographer *extraordinaire* **Sherif Sonbol** will forever continue to gain recognition for his unrivalled talent. Two years ago, his photograph of an elderly Egyptian man won the annual BMW photo-journalism competition in Bahrain. And for a while, it seemed that he had placed the judging panel in quite a predicament. It was obvious that the photographs he had submitted this year were first prize material, but the competition rules clearly stated that no photographer could be awarded the prize more than once. The solution? Last week **Sherif** was proudly informed that he had been awarded an honourary prize, making him the first photographer in the competition's five-year history to be awarded two prizes. And the photographs in question? You, dear readers, were the first to see them, when they were published earlier this year in the *Weekly* as part of a double-page feature spread on *zar*.

♦ The unrelenting battle of the districts rages on, dears. Maadi dwellers and their Heliopolis counterparts continue their fierce and merciless fight to prove that no district other than their own could possibly be worthy of living in. And in the midst of all the heartlessness, I feel it my duty to step in and resolve the struggle once and for all. But first, let me tell you this: my good friend, **Hamida Moefi**, is the publisher and editor-in-chief of *Heliopolis* magazine, a free monthly English-language publication that informs and provides the glorious area's residents with the goings on and services available in Heliopolis. The only problem I ever had with the magazine was that it was a little too flimsy, a little too bulletin-like. No more, dears. Last week, I was pleasantly surprised to receive this month's issue — a real magazine, dears, with full colour front and back pages and a wealth of interesting articles and information inside, ranging from how to cook a traditional German Christmas dinner, to aromatherapy for the home. A real treat to read, dears, especially because the chairman and advertising consultant also happens to be another good friend of mine, **Abdel-Moneim Ziko**. *Maadi Messenger* — eat your heart out. Now, about that little argument...

♣ Whenever I go to Sinai, dears, and revel in its overwhelming beauty, I often think to myself: wouldn't it be nice if there was some way I could capture all this, along with some knowledge of the history. And now, it seems, my prayers have been answered, for just a few days ago, I received a marvellous marvellous book, commissioned by the oil company we all — now that we know how committed it is to enhancing the splendours of Egypt — love so well, Mobil in Egypt. *Sinai: The Site and the History* includes magnificent photographs of the region by prominent Italian photographer **Luciano Romano** and renowned Egyptian underwater photographer **Ayman Taher**. Not only that, but it also contains text by outstanding Egyptian scholars and authorities, each within their own field of expertise on that amazing region. The love of **Gamal Mokhtar, Fouad Iskander, Gawdat Gabra, Samir Sobhi** and **Ayman Taher** for Sinai is beautifully reflected in their chapters, as is **Mursi Saad El-Din's** in his splendid effort to compile, edit and introduce the book. Designed and printed by the world famous Italian publisher **Franco Maria Ricci**, it will take its exalted place on my bookshelf next to the first two books in the series, *Cairo: The Site and the History*, and *Alexandria: The Site and the History*.





Clockwise: Mahfouz has his cake between Inas and Naim; Sonbol's *zar*; Christmas carols galore in Cairo; Sinai in the hand — a feast for the eyes

